

Negotiating the Sacred Space

**A Comparative Study of the Impact of the Dynamics of
Culture and Christian Theology on Women in the South
Sea Evangelical Church, and in the Anglican Church of
Melanesia, Small Malaita, Solomon Islands**

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Dedication

This doctoral thesis is dedicated to my beloved parents *Mama 'a* **Joseph Christian Wate**, and *teitee* **Clarah Houtoro Wate**, whose love, care, and hard work have made this pathway possible for me. You have now departed this life, but your legacy of perseverance and hard work live on to shine out. The dedication of this thesis is also extended to their grandchildren; Charles Vincent, Charisma, Lisa, Rose, Clarah, and JC Sandra, and beloved wife Ethel Wate

Abstract

The discourses on women's empowerment, leadership and development in the contemporary Pacific, and Melanesia suggest that local women in these regions are discriminated against and denied gender equality with men. The experience of disempowerment, and the unequal relationship between men and women is evident in all levels of societies, including local communities, government agencies, civil society and even church organisations. Contemporaneously, women continue to seek, advance and aspire to forms of leadership empowerment, and embrace their own visions of development for themselves and their communities in specific areas, such as the main Christian churches and the fellowships, unions, groups and committees that constitute them.

This thesis is a comparative study of the dynamics of gender relations and women's empowerment, and development in the South Sea Evangelical Church (SSEC), and the Anglican Church of Melanesia (ACOM), in the Solomon Islands with particular attention to Small Malaita. The study draws on local church women's experience, particularly the SSEC Women's Fellowship, and the ACOM Mothers' Union. The study suggests that major differences exist between the two churches, regarding doctrines and faith traditions, missionary philosophies, the treatment of the Bible, and approaches to local culture. Nevertheless, despite the differences, local women in both churches have continued to experience unequal treatment in the relationship between men and women in formal leadership in the two churches. Men assume formal and public leadership, while women take on a leadership role in fellowship groups, youth and children's ministry and at the same time oversee the general care of local church buildings. This present scenario is historically constituted and shaped by missionaries' philosophies, and reinforced by local cultural beliefs.

However, I argue that while these experiences have become widespread, the local church women are not passive but actively deal with local situations in an appropriate manner relevant to their respective socio-cultural contexts. This has provided a framework for personal and collective development, self-fulfilment and varying forms of leadership in specific gendered domains.

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Table of Contents

Dedication	ii
Abstract.....	iii
Acknowledgements	iv
List of Figures.....	xii
List of Tables.....	xiv
Glossary.....	xv
List of Abbreviations	xx
Chapter 1: Introduction: An Overview	1
Indigenous Language.....	18
Limitation of the Thesis.....	19
The SSEC and the ACOM	19
Aims and Objectives	21
Importance of the Research	22
Research Contribution	22
Thesis Structure	25
Chapter 2: Research Methodology	30
Introduction	30
The Researcher in the ACOM.....	30
The Researcher and the South Sea Evangelical Church (SSEC).....	31
Positionality of Researcher in Ethnographic Research	32
Indigenous Concerns and Research Approach.....	44
Research Methodology	46
Fieldwork and Research Methods.....	47
Fieldwork.....	47
Case Study Approach	52
‘Oohoung (story telling).....	57
Participant Observation	58
Focus groups.....	60
Document Analysis.....	61
Participants	62
Language	64
Research Ethics	66
Research Feedback	69
Data Analysis and Presentation	71
Conclusion	72
Chapter 3: Women’s Status in Solomon Islands	74
Introduction	74
Background to Solomon Islands.....	75
Governance	76
Population	76
Religious Affiliation	77

Economic Status	77
Social Life and Local Political Organisation	78
Traditional Religious Beliefs	79
Kinship System	80
Gendered Division of Labour	81
The Impact of Traditions, Colonialism, and Missionary Ideologies on Women.....	82
Education	86
106,333	90
Women and Socio-economic life: Employment, Unemployment and Poverty.	91
Women and leadership	95
Women and Violence	96
Women and Health	97
Gender Relationships	98
Women and Political Leadership	99
The Expanding roles of Women	100
Women and Leadership Roles in the Church	102
Local Women and Human Rights	104
Women’s Groups and Organisations.....	107
Conclusion	111
Chapter 4: Historical Profile of the South Seas Evangelical Church, and the Anglican	
Church of Melanesia	113
Introduction	113
The History of the South Sea Evangelical Church (SSEC).....	114
Labour Recruitment and the Queensland Kanaka Mission	114
The Founding Philosophy of QKM	116
Florence Young and the QKM SSEM	118
From Queensland to Solomon Islands: From the QKM to the SSEM	121
The Missionary Approach to Women’s Education and Formation of the Women’s Group.	126
<i>Fiku ana Kini</i> Women’s Band (now Women’s Fellowship)	129
The Birth of the South Sea Evangelical Church (SSEC)	130
Foundational Christian Belief	132
The SSEC Approach to Cultural Tradition.....	133
Formation of SSEC: SSEC Regions, Associations and Zones	134
The Formal Leadership Structure	138
The History of the Anglican Church of Melanesia	140
George Augustus Selwyn	142
John Coleridge Patteson	144
Missiological foundation of the Melanesian Mission	145
The Melanesian Mission Approach to Women’s Education.....	148
Enabling local Christian teachers’ wives	148
Christian women	150
The Mothers’ Union	152
Mothers’ Union Aims and Objectives.....	153
Constitution and Structure	154
The Anglican Church of Melanesia	154
Foundation of Faith.....	155
Governance Structure	156

Organisational structure.....	158
Conclusion.....	159
Chapter 5: Gender Relations and Women’s Empowerment.....	161
in a Church Setting.....	161
Introduction.....	161
Gender Relations, Melanesian Personhood, and Egalitarianism.....	161
Gender Relations, Complementarity, and Work.....	173
Christian Feminism and Theological Discourses.....	176
The Bible as a Patriarchal Text.....	176
Colonialism, the Christian Missions and Women.....	183
The Dilemmas of the Domestic and the Public.....	186
Home & Womanhood.....	187
Christian Sacred Space.....	189
The Role of Women in Leadership.....	190
Christian Women’s Sociality.....	191
Colonial Model of Womanhood.....	192
Women’s Empowerment and Leadership.....	193
Theories of Empowerment, Leadership, and Powerlessness.....	193
Forms of Empowerment.....	194
Dynamics of Empowerment.....	195
Women’s Empowerment in Solomon Islands.....	197
Church Women’s groups and Empowerment.....	199
Christian Spirituality & Empowerment.....	200
Women’s Sociality and Empowerment.....	202
Cultural Symbols and Empowerment.....	203
Conclusion.....	203
Chapter 6: Gender Relations in the SSEC Church Women’s Fellowship and the ACOM	
Mothers’ Union on Small Malaita.....	206
Introduction.....	206
The Experience of the Small Malaita Women’s Fellowship and the Mothers’ Union.....	212
<i>Hu’e huni helehele</i> (Woman as a Subordinate).....	213
<i>Ka’a Malisi</i> (Unfit).....	213
<i>Hu’e e Mwamwate</i> (Woman is without weight).....	216
<i>Mwane pwaune Hu’e</i> (Man as head of Woman).....	217
<i>Hu’e ka’a Manata</i> (Woman Lacks Intelligence).....	220
<i>Huni Ne’i Hu’e</i> (Being a Woman).....	224
<i>Hu’e huni Liolioi Suli Ha’awali</i> (Woman as a temporary Leader).....	228
The Local Church Women and Empowerment.....	231
<i>Asunge a Masta</i> (Master’s Work).....	232
<i>Teitee</i> (Motherhood).....	237
Power to Manage Marriage crisis.....	240
Empowering Personal Transformation.....	244
Conclusion.....	248
Chapter 7: Comparative Analysis: The Dynamics of Gender.....	249
Relations and Women’s Empowerment in the SSEC and the ACOM.....	249

Introduction	249
The SSEC and the ACOM Women’s Experience Compared	250
Women’s Groups and their Commitments	259
Women and Administrative Leadership.....	263
Women and Local Cultural Activities	264
Paradoxical Experience and Gender relations	268
Local Church Women: Negotiating the Patriarchy for Empowerment.....	275
Cultural and Maternal Values.....	280
<i>Teitee Maa’i</i> (Christian Motherhood) and <i>Kenii Maa’i</i> (Christian Womanhood).....	283
Conclusion	285
Chapter 8: Conclusion	286
Introduction	286
Research Focus	287
Research findings.....	287
Men for formal leadership, women for domestic leadership	287
Historical Missionary Impact on Churches.....	288
Local Customs’ Influence on the Churches.....	290
Church Constitutions.....	291
Paradox and Complications	291
Church Women and Agency for Empowerment	292
Options for Future Research.....	293
Bibliography	295
APPENDIX 1: INFORMATION SHEET FOR PARTICIPANTS.....	320
APPENDIX 2: CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPANTS	324
APPENDIX 3: RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS	326
APPENDIX 4: THE SSEC AND THE ACOM CHURCH LEADERS AND CHURCH WOMEN’S GROUP LEADERS	327

List of Figures

Figure 1: The Reverend Joseph Wate a'epule	9
Figure 2: Participating in a feast at Sa'a with our clan	10
Figure 3: Map of Solomon Islands.....	12
Figure 4: Main Languages spoken on Small Malaita	13
Figure 5: The Mainstream Churches on Small Malaita	14
Figure 6: Research Area.....	15
Figure 7: Likimaea SSEC village	16
Figure 8: Riverside SSEC village.	17
Figure 9: The Roone village SSEC local church.	18
Figure 10: Ben Wate poses with <i>O'uo'u inemaui</i> , Ainimae O'uo'u.....	45
Figure 11: Likimaea SSEC village in the highlands of Small Malaita.	48
Figure 12: Disembarking from an OBM.....	49
Figure 13: A member of Roone SSEC Women's Fellowship at an interview session	54
Figure 14: The author preaching at Riverside local church on Father's Day Sunday.	59
Figure 15: Focus group discussion at Sa'a	61
Figure 16: Ben Wate offering a token of saediananga (appreciation).	68
Figure 17: Research feedback session	69
Figure 18: On the way for research feedback session.....	70
Figure 19: Map of the Pacific	75
Figure 20: Women preparing local food.....	83
Figure 21: Girls are expected to stay at home to help their mothers.	88
Figure 22: Along the Streets of Honiara	93
Figure 23: Members of West 'Are'Are Rokotaniken Association (WARA)	108
Figure 24: A local women's group	109
Figure 25: The Young Women's Parliamentary Group (YWPG).	110
Figure 26: The Malaita Provincial Council of Women (MPCW).....	111
Figure 27: Florence Young, founder of QKM and SSEM (SSEC).....	119
Figure 28: Deck and Griffiths families	120
Figure 29: The baptism of Melanesian labourer converts in Queensland	122

Figure 30: Male students in military like parade at Onepusu	124
Figure 31: South Sea Islanders ready for deportation at Cairns, 1906	125
Figure 32: Joan Deck teaching the men at Onepusu	127
Figure 33: Likimaea SSEC local church Women’s Fellowship	129
Figure 34: Delegates representing Solomon Islands in 1964.....	131
Figure 35: SSEC Zones in The South Sea Evangelical Church, Solomon Islands.....	135
Figure 36: SSEC Organisation structure.....	136
Figure 37: Leadership tiers and positions	139
Figure 38: Melanesian girls on Norfolk Island learning to sew.....	141
Figure 39: Founder of the Melanesian Mission, Bishop George Augustus Selwyn	142
Figure 40: A female student using a sewing machine at St Hilda Bungana, Ngella, Solomon Islands	151
Figure 41: Joint fellowship of Walande and Sa’a parish Mothers’ Union groups.....	152
Figure 42: Anglican Church of Melanesia.....	155
Figure 43: Tiers of Governance	157
Figure 44: ACOM Organizational Structure.....	159
Figure 45: Indrid Honitalokeni	227
Figure 46: Female Gender Stereotypes.....	252
Figure 47: A member of the Mothers’ Union	255
Figure 48: Women’s dance at the Small Malaita Yam Cultural Festival, 2018	265
Figure 49: Public notice at Herani e’si SSEC village, Small Malaita	269

List of Tables

Table 1: Total Enrolment by Education Level, School Type and Gender, 2015-201690

Table 2: Solomon Islands Indentured Labourers in Queensland and Fiji 1870-1911
..... 115

Glossary

Sa'a	English
<i>A'a a' i la'a</i>	strong
<i>Apu/abu/tabu</i>	sacred/holy
<i>A'ena hu'e</i>	woman's leg
<i>A'ihenue</i>	founding tribe
<i>Alaha</i>	chief
<i>Alaha O'u O'u</i>	high chief
<i>Alahanga</i>	chiefly authority
<i>Amasinge</i>	Compassion
<i>Asunge a Masta</i>	Master's work (literally mean God's work)
<i>A'wataa</i>	stranger/visitor
<i>Djadjawau djadjamai</i>	give- and - recieve (reciprocity)
<i>Dunge</i>	fire
<i>Ha'a hilihili</i>	to restrict or abstain
<i>Ha'ama'unge</i>	respect or honour
<i>Ha'a mwa'a susu</i>	shell valuable given to the mother of a bride
<i>Ha'a mwaimweia'nga</i>	to humble
<i>Ha'apo'e</i>	local pudding
<i>Ha'atahanga</i>	shell valuable used in Small Malaita
<i>Ha'a tau</i>	far in distance
<i>Ha'atolanga</i>	rule
<i>Ha'amwasi</i>	to make fun
<i>Hanue ni alaha</i>	chiefly village
<i>Hanue 'e pwala</i>	empty village
<i>Hanue ni alaha</i>	chiefly village
<i>Hii aela</i>	feel bad
<i>Hi'ehi'e</i>	heavy (with weight/importance)
<i>Hiki 'olanga</i>	first harvest

<i>Holikeninge</i>	bride price ceremony
<i>Hu'e</i>	woman
<i>Hu'e aela</i>	bad woman
<i>Hu'e kohi</i>	good woman
<i>Hu'e e mwamwate</i>	woman without weight
<i>Hu'e kaleni soiha'a dja'inge</i>	Christian woman
<i>Hu'e ka'a manata</i>	woman lacks knowledge
<i>Hu'e tolahani inoni ana</i>	a woman with good manners (<i>kastom</i>)
<i>Hu'e maa'i</i>	holy woman
<i>Hu'e huni helehele</i>	woman to subordinate (to help)
<i>Ilenimwa'enga</i>	happiness/joyous
<i>Ini ma'ai</i>	holy one
<i>Inoni aela</i>	bad person
<i>Iola</i>	tribe (canoe)
<i>Ka'a malisi</i>	unfit/not capable
<i>Ka'a manata</i>	without knowledge or ignorant
<i>Ka'a sai me'u</i>	not afraid (confident)
<i>Kaleni soihadjange</i>	a Christian (a church member)
<i>Keni</i>	female
<i>Keni mola mwakule</i>	woman without value
<i>Ki'i ki'i huni pe'i</i>	helping hand
<i>Kira tei?</i>	who are they?
<i>Leu maa'i</i>	Sacred place (sanctuary)
<i>Liosuli</i>	to manage
<i>Li'oa</i>	Spirit (reference to God)
<i>Liolio suli ha'a wali</i>	to look after temporarily
<i>Lolahono</i>	a log that separates men and women's spaces
<i>Lolata maa'i</i>	holy sanctuary
<i>Madja'a</i>	dirty
<i>Maetaa</i>	mortuary feast

<i>Maha</i>	Pollutant power
<i>Mala mwaimwei</i>	Small people (also means Small Malaita)
<i>Malisi</i>	fit or capable
<i>Malisi na Masta</i>	suitable/fit for Master (God)
<i>Malunga'a</i>	sacred shadow
<i>Mama'a</i>	father
<i>Mama'a ta'ilengi</i>	father in heaven
<i>Manekonga</i>	humility
<i>Mao ni keni</i>	women's dance
<i>Masa</i>	shame/embarrass
<i>Mwa'inio'la</i>	bride price
<i>Mwamwate</i>	light (without weight)
<i>Maumeuringe djiana</i>	good life
<i>Mere nikana Jisas</i>	Mary the mother of Jesus
<i>Mwa'emwa'enga</i>	obedience
<i>Mwasine</i>	a brotherly/sisterly relative
<i>Mwala ni haka</i>	white people (Americans/Europeans)
<i>Mamaa</i>	Father or priest
<i>Mamaa ni Niu Silani</i>	a New Zealand Father (priest)
<i>Maha</i>	pollution/desacralise
<i>Mangadja</i>	bonito fishing season
<i>Mola</i>	ordinary
<i>Nume</i>	house
<i>Nume ni alaha</i>	chiefly house
<i>Ngolita</i>	food prepared served during funeral
<i>Ngauhe ni keni</i>	women's feast
<i>Nunutaolo</i>	shaky/ without confidence
<i>Nga ho e'e a'kue</i>	a betelnut for me (begging for betelnut)
<i>O'uo'u inemaui</i>	high chief
<i>'Oohoung</i>	story telling

<i>Purine</i>	behind
<i>Pwaune 'e aela</i>	without proper thinking (ignorant)
<i>Po'onimwane</i>	a clan
<i>Pwapwa</i>	granny mother
<i>Poru</i>	husband
<i>Pwaune hu'e</i>	woman's head
<i>Parani o'o areare</i>	a sounding drum
<i>Pwau</i>	sub-clan
<i>pulitaa ni teitee</i>	a group of mothers
<i>Saen-saen</i>	shine-shine
<i>Sae ni amasinge</i>	mind of compassion
<i>Saenanaunge</i>	knowledge/education
<i>Salunge</i>	pain/suffering
<i>Soihadjainge</i>	church
<i>Sae-salu</i>	painful mind (sorry/disappointed)
<i>Sa'edinanga</i>	good-heart/gratefulness
<i>Tolahani inoni</i>	moral code (<i>kastom</i>)
<i>Tafulia'e</i>	shell valuable used in North Malaita
<i>Tolaisulinge</i>	obedience
<i>Toro</i>	a woman from a chiefly house
<i>Toohi</i>	chief's lodge
<i>Teitee</i>	mother
<i>Teitee maa'i</i>	holy mother
<i>Walana Masta</i>	Master's word
Other languages	
Lau	
<i>Wane-asi</i>	coastal dwelling people (saltwater people)
<i>Wane-tolo</i>	inland dwelling people (bush people)
Solomon Islands Pidgin	
<i>Poen</i>	point (idea)

<i>Lesin</i>	Lesson to learn
<i>Masta</i>	Master (big-man - reference to God/Jesus)
<i>Saen-saen</i>	shine-shine
<i>Baek slada</i>	non committed Christian(Christian by name)
<i>Kospel</i>	gospel
Kwara'e	
<i>Fiku ana kini</i>	group of women
Kolobangara	
<i>Bangara</i>	chief/important leaders

List of Abbreviations

ACOM	Anglican Church of Melanesia
ACOMGS	ACOM General Synod
BPTC	Bishop Patteson Theological College
BSIP	British Solomon Islands Protectorate
CBSI	Central Bank of Solomon Islands
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CMS	Church Missionary Society
COB	Council of Bishops
COC	Christian Outreach Centre
COE	Church of England
CRC	Christian Revival Centre
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women
CSC	Community of the Sisters of the Church
DFAT	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
DMU	Diocesan Mothers' Union
DOM	Diocese of Malaita
GFS	Girls Friendly Society
GG	Girl Guides
GMCPIGSI	Gender Mainstream Capacity of Pacific Islands Governments - Solomon Islands
LMS	London Missionary Society
LSE	London School of Economics and Political Science
MM	Melanesian Mission
MoPSMCL	Ministry of Public Service Master Civil List
MP	Members of Parliament
MPA	Member of Provincial Assembly
MSc	Master of Science
MWYCFA	Ministry of Women, Youth Children & Family Affairs

MWEDP	Malaita Women’s Empowerment & Development Policy
NEB	National Eldership Board
NEBB	National Executive Board
OBM	Outboard Motor
PAR	Performance Assessment Report
PMU	Provincial Mothers’ Union
PTC	Pacific Theological College
QKM	Queensland Kanaka Mission
RCC	Roman Catholic Church
RSIPF	Rural Solomon Island Police Force
SICR	Solomon Islands Country Report
SI-CEDOW- CI- STPR.	Solomon Islands CEDOW Combined Initial, Second & Third Periodic Report,
SIWIBA	Solomon Islands Women in Business Association
SIFHSSR	Solomon Islands Family Heath Safety Study Report
SINSB	Solomon Islands National Statistical Bulletin
SSEC	South Sea Evangelical Church
SSEM	South Sea Evangelical Mission
SDA	Seventh Day Adventist
UCSI	United Church of Solomon Islands
UCWF	United Church Women’s Fellowship
UCSI	United Church of Solomon Islands
UN	United Nations
WARA	West ‘Are‘Are Rokotanikeni Association.
WCSDH	World Conference on Social Determinants of Health
WCC	World Council of Churches
YWPG	Young Women’s Parliamentary Group
YPSU	Young People Scriptures Union

Chapter 1: Introduction: An Overview

Setting the Scene

Sister Veronica Vasethe, from the Anglican Diocese of Ysabel, Solomon Islands, and a life-vow member of the Anglican Community of Sisters of the Church (CSC) was ordained as a Deacon in London's Diocese of Southwark on 2 October 2011. The process leading up to her ordination was facilitated by the CSC, since its convent is located in Ham, Richmond, London, within its jurisdiction.

Veronica was the first Melanesian woman to be ordained within the Church of England (she was ordained priest the following year). It was her ordination as Deacon by the Church of England that deeply offended the Anglican Church of Melanesia (ACOM), sparking angry debate. The Province of Melanesia had not consented to the ordination of women, and as an independent Province within the wider Anglican Communion, its position should have been respected by the Church of England. In essence, the ordination of a Solomon Islands woman challenged the Melanesian church; constitutionally, culturally and Biblically. Constitutionally, although the General Synod has generally endorsed the ordination of women, by tradition all the dioceses within the Province have to unanimously agree to a resolution before it can be allowed and practised throughout the Province. In this case, there has been declining support for the ordination of women by a large number of dioceses since the early 1990s. The ordination of women has therefore not been accepted in the Anglican Province of Melanesia, and the ordination of an ACOM woman was considered unconstitutional and illegal. It could not be recognised (ACOM 13th General Synod Minutes, 2011).

In 2011, the ACOM 13th General Synod held at St. Nicholas College in Honiara, capital of Solomon Islands, raised its concern to the Church of England, particularly the Diocese of Southwark and the CSC, about ordaining Sister Veronica without permission from the ACOM. A motion was approved by the General Synod to formally raise the concern of the Melanesian Province with the Church of England.

The debate about the validity of the ordination of Sister Veronica was complex. It is complex in the sense that while the ACOM believes that God has created both men and

women equal in his own image, the way the validity of Sister Veronica's ordination to priesthood was challenged and demonstrated that women were still being discriminated against when it comes to the appointment of people to formal leadership in the church. The debate around the validity of the ordination of women is embedded in local culture and its significant influences together with the historical missionary legacy that informs contemporary church practice and belief. Furthermore, Sister Veronica is a member of a worldwide Anglican female religious order, so she is not exclusively under the authority of the ACOM with obligations to the religious order and the Province in which she serves; hence her ordination is valid. On the other hand, the ACOM argues that while her religious life affiliation is currently with the global CSC, her traditional and cultural orientation is within the ACOM. In circumstances requiring her to return to Solomon Islands, her priesthood would be viewed as invalid or unconstitutional because the ACOM constitution does not provide for women's ordination. This has been one of the critical questions that has challenged the ACOM during the General Synod debate – whether Sister Veronica's priesthood is valid or invalid. This question was raised in light of the impasse between the absence of constitutional provision for the ordination of women, and the Christian belief and theological affirmation that God created both men and women in his image, and that his grace is sufficient for both genders. The approach to ordination of women to Christian ministries vary in different provinces and regions within the Anglican Communion. For instance, the ordination of women is accepted in the Anglican Province of Aotearoa New Zealand and Polynesia, in England, and in the United States of America (USA). However, there is strong opposition against the ordination of women in some parts of South East Asia, and Papua New Guinea. The General Synod resolution to ordain women has been continually being declined support by certain dioceses when it was put to their respective assent. However, the motion has often been re-tabled in the General Synods for deliberation.

At an ACOM Council of Bishops' (COB) meeting held in the same year, a letter outlining the restriction of the priestly ministry of Sister Veronica was endorsed by the bishops and was sent to her. The letter prohibited her from exercising her priestly ministry in any of the ACOM villages, parishes, dioceses or institutions, apart from her own religious Order, that

of the CSC in *Tete ni Kolivuti* (TNK) on the eastern side of Honiara, Guadalcanal. The restriction order which was termed a “hospitality offer” remains in force.¹

This narrative personifies the complex situation that women face in Solomon Islands, and even more in a Christian church environment that promises liberation and freedom for women (Ninkama, 1987; also see, Fiorenza, 1993; Robert, 2002). Sister Veronica’s situation was not isolated. Similar debates, dilemmas and controversies about women’s leadership have arisen, and continue to arise, in other mainstream churches in Solomon Islands, most notably, the South Sea Evangelical Church (SSEC), which was a parallel site of research for this thesis.

Sister Veronica’s experience illuminates broader factors affecting local church thinking about the roles and status of women in leadership positions. The displacement and non-recognition of an ordained woman priest reflects the paradoxes of gender inequality juxtaposed with demands for equality in contemporary Solomon Islands. Sister Veronica’s priesthood is invalid in the ACOM, because the church constitution has not catered for a female priesthood; culturally, women are not permitted to take on public leadership roles in the church, most importantly because this involves performing priestly rituals at the church altar within the sanctuary. At the deepest level in Melanesian society, women are considered ritually unclean and polluted and therefore unworthy to appear before the sacred altar and church congregations where important men might be in attendance. In Solomon Islands particularly on Malaita, anthropologists have noted the local people’s concern about the risk of social and religious effect from women’s bodily pollution and space in Malaitan society. For instance, Elly Maranda’s (1974) study of the *abu* (taboo) and its effect on women among the Lau people of Malaita, Roger Keesing (1982; 1987) who studied Kwaio religion of Malaita, and Ben Burt’s (1994) analysis of Kwaraa’e cultural codes of behaviour, the *falafala (kastom)* (Burt, 1994:5) tradition, have highlighted the gendered spatiality that re-enforce the local socio-religious notion of *abu* restriction that dictated the local people’s life. These studies were undertaken in different parts of Malaita, and although some of which have been conducted in earlier years, these beliefs have continued to this day despite socio-cultural change on Malaita. The anthropological literature on

¹ In a personal conversation with the author on 23 March 2017 at St John’s College, Auckland, Archbishop George Takeli referred to the provisional permission given to Sister Veronica as a *hospitality offer*.

women's *abu* and menstruation deal with beliefs and practices that are part of public culture that impact the broader ritual and social life of people including the church in Solomon Islands, particularly on Malaita. These perceptions have greatly affected the churches in Solomon Islands and their thinking about women.

Melanesian societies are characterised by gendered distinctions, demarcations and divisions of labour which regulate power in holding offices. The organisation of local churches has mirrored these gendered dualisms and relationships. Keeping to this tradition, women such as Sister Veronica are prohibited from assuming public leadership roles in the church, let alone the role of a priest, which requires entrance into the sacred shrine or sanctuary (see Maranda, 1974; Keesing, 1982;1992; Burt, 1994) to preside over a Eucharist and to administer the sacramental elements to the congregation, especially to men. A number of church leaders are of the view that the Bible does not support female priests. Having a woman priest preside at the altar is believed to be a clear violation of Christian and Biblical tradition.

The discourses on gender relations in Melanesia are premised on male control, gendered discrimination and unequal access of women to leadership in socio-economic, political and religious spheres at different levels of society (Jolly, 1987; Dureau, 1993; Pollard, 2000; Dickson-Waiko, 2003; Douglas, 2003; MacDougall, 2003; Macintyre, 2003; Soaki, 2017). Women are discriminated at and viewed as subordinated agents to male leadership. In many circumstances, women are left to take on leadership roles in domestic environment, and pushed to manage local women's groups (Jolly, 1987; Dureau, 1993; Knauff, 1997; Pollard, 2000; Dickson-Waiko, 2003; Douglas, 2003; MacDougall, 2003; Macintyre, 2003; cf. Lamphere, 1974; Forman, 1984; Ortner, 1986).

Local church women experience inequality in church settings in Melanesia. In Melanesia, including Solomon Islands, the monopoly of male leadership in Christian churches has been criticised (see Nikama, 1987). Positions of authority and leadership are reserved for men, while on the periphery other minor leadership roles that mostly deal with women's organisations and rural church community's social services are reserved to local women (cf. Cox, 2017; McDougall, 2017). For example, although women are given some leadership authority, women do not always have equal access to the same power and

privileges like men (cf. Cox, 2017; McDougall, 2017). These offices are regarded as sacred and women are not allowed to undertake them (Forman, 1984: 153-172; Langmore, 1987; Jolly, 1989; cf. Burt, 1994).

Not only in formal leadership are women discriminated against, but this occurs more generally in church communities in Melanesia, where there is a general pattern of subordination of women to male leadership, and their engagement in caring for church physical buildings. Studies conducted in other parts of Melanesia (Robert, 2002; MacDougall, 2003; Pollard, 2003; Scheyvens, 2003; Eriksen, 2005; Choi & Jolly, 2014) have shown that women have also experienced similar treatment (Robert, 2002; MacDougall, 2003; Pollard, 2003; Scheyvens, 2003; Eriksen, 2005; Choi & Jolly, 2014). The disparity of women's and men's roles and status in church life has been observed by Rose Kara Nikama, a female theological student from Papua New Guinea. Nikama (1987) observes that churches in Melanesia have tended to view women as passive, unintelligent and thus regarded as inferior, unlike the men who are viewed as aggressive and intelligent. She concludes that by polarising respective sexes indexed by gendered beliefs, men and women are limited to their respective spheres (Ninkama, 1987:128).

Such beliefs and gender stereotypes are widespread in Solomon Islands Christianity. While some churches have given prominent leadership roles to women such as in the case of the United Church in Solomon Islands, their leadership status do not equate the men's leadership status roles. Their leadership roles are specifically focus on women, youth and children's ministry groups (Cox, 2017; Macintyre, 2017). Overall, while the churches have comparatively different approaches to women's leadership, nevertheless, local church women in Solomon Islands have experienced similar gendered stereotypes, inequality, discrimination and subordination in local church communities and societies.

This research is a comparative study of gender relations in the SSEC and the ACOM. It explores the dynamics of gender relations in both churches and compares how two churches approach the roles and status of women in relation to leadership, empowerment and decision-making within their respective congregations. This study covers the experience of local church women in their respective rural church communities, and how they expressed themselves in dealing with the constraining situation of subordination, discrimination both at the collective and personal levels.

Research Context

This study was conducted in Solomon Islands, in the SSEC and the ACOM on Small Malaita, an island to the South of Malaita, separated by a narrow channel (see maps 2 & 3), among the Women's Fellowship and the Mothers' Union church women's groups respectively. The choice for Solomon Islands and specifically Small Malaita as a location for this study is a significant one. Malaita was notable for resisting colonialism and has strongly invoked the notion of *kastom* to define social life and gender roles (Keesing, 1982; 1989; Burt, 1994; Pollard, 2006; Akin, 2013; Cox, 2017; Soaki, 217). Small Malaita, being part of Malaita also shared similar notions and beliefs about the roles that men and women perform in local communities. However, Malaita has smaller, culturally specific polities. Comparatively, the socio-cultural and economic life in Small Malaita is mediated by the authority of *alahanga* (chiefly authority), guided by *tolahani inoni (kastom)* (see Ivens, 1972; Coppet, 1995; Wate, 2013). In this context, local church denominations on contemporary Small Malaita are still considered as foreign although the process of Christian missionisation of the island had begun during the late 19th century. Overall, the church assumes no absolute authority over their immediate congregations if there is a conflict between traditional customary authority and church doctrines and practices. Situating the study on Small Malaita has helped to ease the problem of generalisation and simplification of gender relations, and women's specific experiences and concerns. It is for these reasons that although the local women's situation, culture and social life in Small Malaita are assumed to be similar to other parts of Malaita and island communities in Solomon Islands, there are circumstances and situations that the local women's experience there are specifically different and the women's views on issues confronting them vary. This will be discussed later in the thesis.

On 8 January 2018, I had a meeting with Sister Veronica at the CSC House, Mission Place, Honiara. At the meeting, I discussed the content of my thesis and informed her that the debate on her ordination to priesthood was providing a good scenario for my thesis. I enquired about her general feeling after she had returned from England and how she was performing her ministry at home in Solomon Islands. I noticed that in the media, particularly in the *Solomon Star* and *The Island Sun* newspapers, there was a story and photograph of Sister Veronica, featuring her taking part in a joint administration of a holy Eucharist with the senior priest of Keava region in Auki, Diocese of Malaita. She told me

that the media publication had indeed aroused criticisms of her participation in administering the sacrament in Auki. That had consequently led to a letter being received from the Archbishop reiterating the restriction imposed by the ACOM Council of Bishops. She said since that time, she has refrained and concentrated on the work of the sisters, managing a kindergarten she had started for children in the neighbouring villages, who do not have access to early childhood and primary schools. The challenges that Sister Veronica has faced on her return to the country, reflect the paradox that mediates gender relations, Christianity and the status of women in Solomon Islands in the early 21st century. According to key indicators (employment, gender based violence and education) women are structurally disadvantaged in Solomon Islands. This is mirrored in church practices, where women are rejected as leaders by patriarchal power structures. These have historical origins in both missionisation and its effects on understandings of *kastom* and culture. At the same time, church spaces, such as the Women's Fellowship in the SSEC and the Mothers' Union in the ACOM, provided spaces for gendered agency and advocacy for equality in parallel spheres of spiritual and temporal influence both within church hierarchies and more broadly communities that share commitments to the Christian faith. In this study I argue that the prevailing low status of women in Solomon Islands today is consequential not solely due to culture or *kastom*, but also changes that accompanied missionisation and colonialism—the redefinition of work, invention of a distinct domestic sphere, a privileging of men in education and employment that perhaps exacerbated patterns of indigenous male dominance. However, while local *kastom* and colonial church are partly responsible for the poor status of women, they are also the forum where they are able to assert themselves.

The Researcher

I grew up in a village called A'ulupeine on Small Malaita. I am the elder of two brothers, with an older sister being the first-born of the family. As in some cases in Small Malaita, I belong to two *po'onimwane* (clan). My paternal great grandfather Joseph Wate a'epule, was originally from the *alahanga* (chiefly authority) of Sa'a village within the *Hailadjami iola* (canoe/tribe). However, my great grandmother Lydia Salokeni Wate was from A'ulupeine village, the *iola* of *O'uo'umatawa*. *Hailadjami* and *O'uo'umatawa* shared a

common border. My great grandmother was the last surviving woman of a clan² within *O'uo'umatawa*. A specific cultural arrangement was therefore agreed upon by the elders of *O'uo'umatawa* tribe to install my grandfather Benjamin Tahapara Wate to occupy Lydia Salokeni's legitimate position within *O'uo'umatawa*.³ Due to this cultural arrangement, I live with my parents at A'ulupeine and occupy the clan, yet continue to maintain connection with my paternal tribe clan of the *alahanga* at Sa'a within the *Hailadjami* tribe.⁴

Joseph Wate a'epule was the first Christian leader on Malaita (Fox, 1958; Ivens, 1972; Moore, 2017). He was recruited at Sa'a by the Melanesian Mission (MM) in 1866 to be brought to New Zealand and Norfolk Island for training. He was ordained deacon on 27 August 1897 (Fox, 1958; Ivens, 1972; Moore, 2017:203-204), the first church leader on Malaita. Lydia accompanied him to Norfolk Island in 1871 to be trained as a Christian wife (Hilliard, 1978) for Joseph Wate. They were married there in 1875. Our family historical connection with the ACOM has flourished ever since.

² The clan's name is concealed because of cultural sensitivity. While there is public knowledge among the local community leaders about our ownership of the clan, I do not wish to reveal details about the clan. It is sensitive and I wish not to allow my personal and family cultural heritage to subdue the significance of this thesis. However, while the family have authentic history and evidence to prove the ownership and leadership of the clan, it is sensitive to mention it in such an academic and public document.

³ British Solomon Islands *Sub-District – Asimeuri Court East South Malaita (28/6/60) Sa'a State, Case 20/60, pp. 1-5*. Solomon Islands National Archives. The record shows the settlement of land disputes between the other party with my grandfather over *Hahoto* land within *O'uo'umatawa* tribal land territory. Our cultural ownership right was highlighted in the land settlement, premised on our great-grandmother's genealogical connection to the tribe. The court decision affirmed her cultural legitimacy to the tribe and land.

⁴ The term *iola* literally means canoe, but principally refers to a tribe and the term *po'onimwane* refers to a clan. (See the glossary). In the local culture of Small Malaita, only more than two *po'onimwane* could make up an *iola*, canoe.



Figure 1: The Reverend Joseph Wate a'epule

My paternal great-grandfather standing in front of the house-church he built on the land he bought for mission school at Sa'a in 1892. **Source:** The Southern Cross Log. *Used with permission from the Anglican Church of Melanesia, Honiara, Solomon Islands.*

As times go by, I have come to realise the importance of my obligation to the Anglican Church and the cultural traditions of our two *iola*. It means being committed to the church rules which maintains my historical link to it and ensures my obligation to the church is carried out. But further to that, coming from the chiefly tribes, I am also bound by specific cultural protocols and obligations.



Figure 2: Participating in a feast at Sa'a with our clan

On the right is my uncle Charles Wate Iepwesa, sorting the clan share of the feast. I participated in the feast by buying a pig for our clan to present it with other baked food at the feast. **Source:** ©Ben Wate, June 2014.

My journey to accomplish and reconnect with the church and with the cultural obligations in a meaningful way, began earlier in my youth. At the age of 20 I attended the Bishop Patteson Theological College, Kohimarama (BPTC) in West Guadalcanal between 1990 and 1993. I was ordained as a deacon in November 1993, and a priest on 6 August 1994. After serving nine years in pastoral ministry at various levels in the ACOM, I attended the Pacific Theological College (PTC), Suva, and graduated with a Bachelor of Divinity. It was there that my interest in anthropology began. Although no anthropological studies were offered at PTC, the mainstream theology that was taught there focused on Pacific and indigenous contextual theology. Such theological thinking shaped my interest and I finally wrote a thesis attempting to rethink the culture of *mwa'inio'la* (bride price) in Small Malaita. These interests inspired me to pursue further research.

I was asked by the ACOM to enrol in a Master's degree study in anthropology. After addressing a number of issues relating to my admission, I was finally offered a space at the

London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE), Master of Science in Social Anthropology (MSc) programme, studying there from 2007 to 2009. My interest in studying the religious notions of *abu* (prohibition) in relation to the social roles and status of women in society was inspired by an Anthropology of Religion course taught at the LSE. My MA dissertation evaluated foreign anthropological and ethnographic studies of the notion of *tabu* or *abu* on Malaita, making a comparative study of how the *wane-aasi* (sea or coastal dwelling people) and *wane-tolo* (inland dwelling people) (see Moore, 2017) are represented in anthropological literature. My interest in the cultural notions of *abu* in these two ethnographic areas in relation to the conditions of local women, has extended to the exploration of the dynamics that constrain the social roles and status, and the participation of women in leadership in local church communities.

The journey to this doctoral study has had a humble beginning. From being a rural village boy, journeying through the pathways of theological studies, I finally ended up in the field of anthropology. The intersection between theological studies and anthropological learning was not the result of mistaken decisions; it has reflected my familial and personal orientations. Being part of the *alahanga* (chiefly authority), I have a major role in protecting the cultural values of the local community. However, this does not undermine the need to have a better understanding of the dynamics of cultural change relating to the roles and status of women. In the same vein, the historical connection of my family in the Church has been further enhanced through my priesthood and ministry in the Anglican Church. These historical connections and better knowledge about the local culture and church life, have given me a privileged position to do this research.

The transition from theological study to anthropology at the postgraduate level of study is both enhancing and challenging. In essence, the study of anthropology has transformed my preconceived cultural and theological perspective about the roles and status of women in both the church and the local society. It offers me the capacity to review church beliefs and practices, the constitution and canonical provisions relating to gender relations, women's position and leadership potential in the Church. In a way my engagement in anthropological study has challenged certain theological beliefs in the ACOM that women were created as subordinated beings; purposely created to perform supportive role to a pre-ordained male leadership structure. The study has challenged these subjective views and offers clarity and new dimensions to the debate on women's roles and gender relations in the church. This

transition has re-positioned my stance in the overall discussion of gender relations both within the ACOM and in the local community on Small Malaita. There is a general experience of freedom, resilience and vigilance in revisiting the church canons, theological and Biblical hermeneutical discussion on debates about gender relations within the church. This experience has not been felt or realised prior to the transition of study but a recent experience when this engagement in anthropology begun.

Small Malaita, or *Mala Mwaimwei* as it is known locally, has been described by many visitors or people who come to know Small Malaitans, as home to people who embrace the attitude of *manekonga* (humility) and who have the innate ways of life that resemble *tolahani inoni*. This view can be well attested in many island communities across Solomon Islands. Small Malaitans are described in Solomon Islands as ‘*man blo South*’ with much respect and honour.

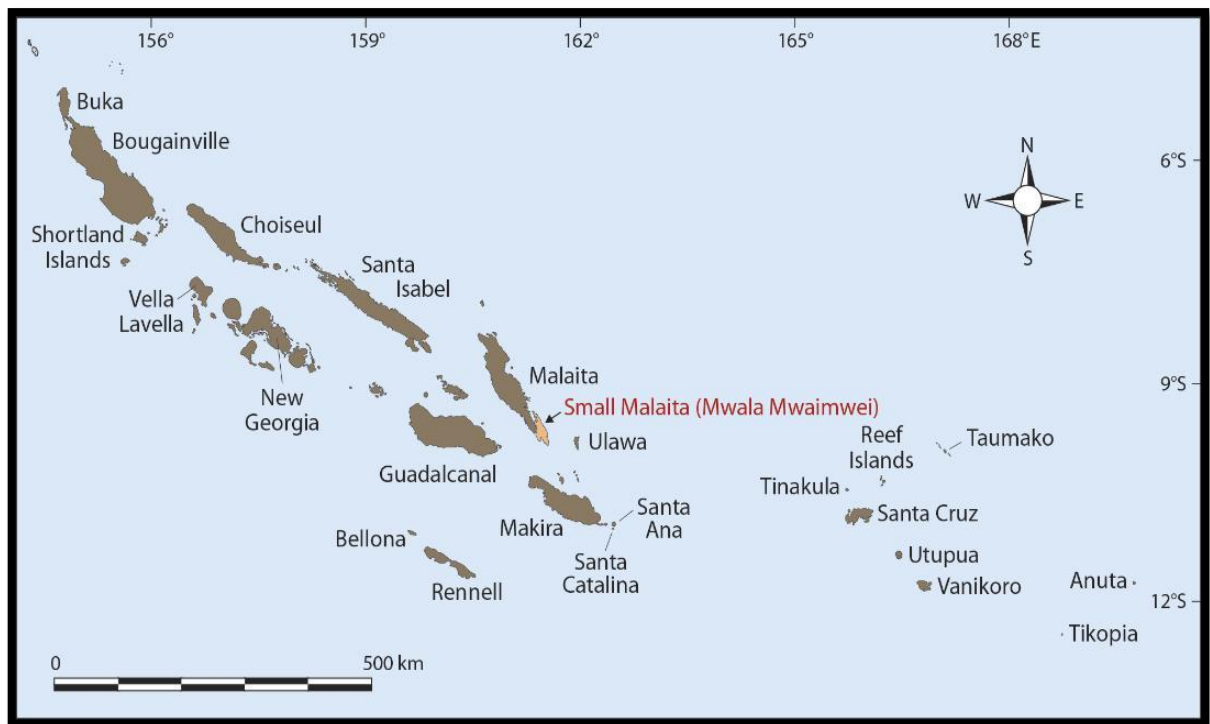


Figure 3: Map of Solomon Islands

Source: ©Les O’Neill, Department of Anthropology & Archaeology, University of Otago, 2018.

Solomon Islands is a culturally diverse country with over 80 different languages. When Christianity arrived in the country in the 19th century, the interaction with local cultures

varied from one place to another depending on differences or similarities between them. One important difference was the presence, or absence of chiefly authority. In Small Malaita the SSEC and the ACOM were received and embraced by the *alahanga*. Similarly in Ysabel, chiefly authority was important to the growth of the Anglican Church on that island (see Hilliard 1978; Whiteman, 1983; White, 1991). The interaction of local culture with Christianity was thus inevitable, and the influence of *tolahani inoni* had a deep influence on local churches in Small Malaita.

The island of Small Malaita lies on the southern tip of the larger Malaita Island. The population of Small Malaita is 12,967 (Solomon Islands Statistic Bulletin, 2011:7) and more than 80% of the population live in rural villages. Small Malaitans speak four languages: Sa'a, Oloha, Lau and 'Are'Are (Ivens, 1972). Sa'a is the main language of the island and is spoken by a large part of the population.

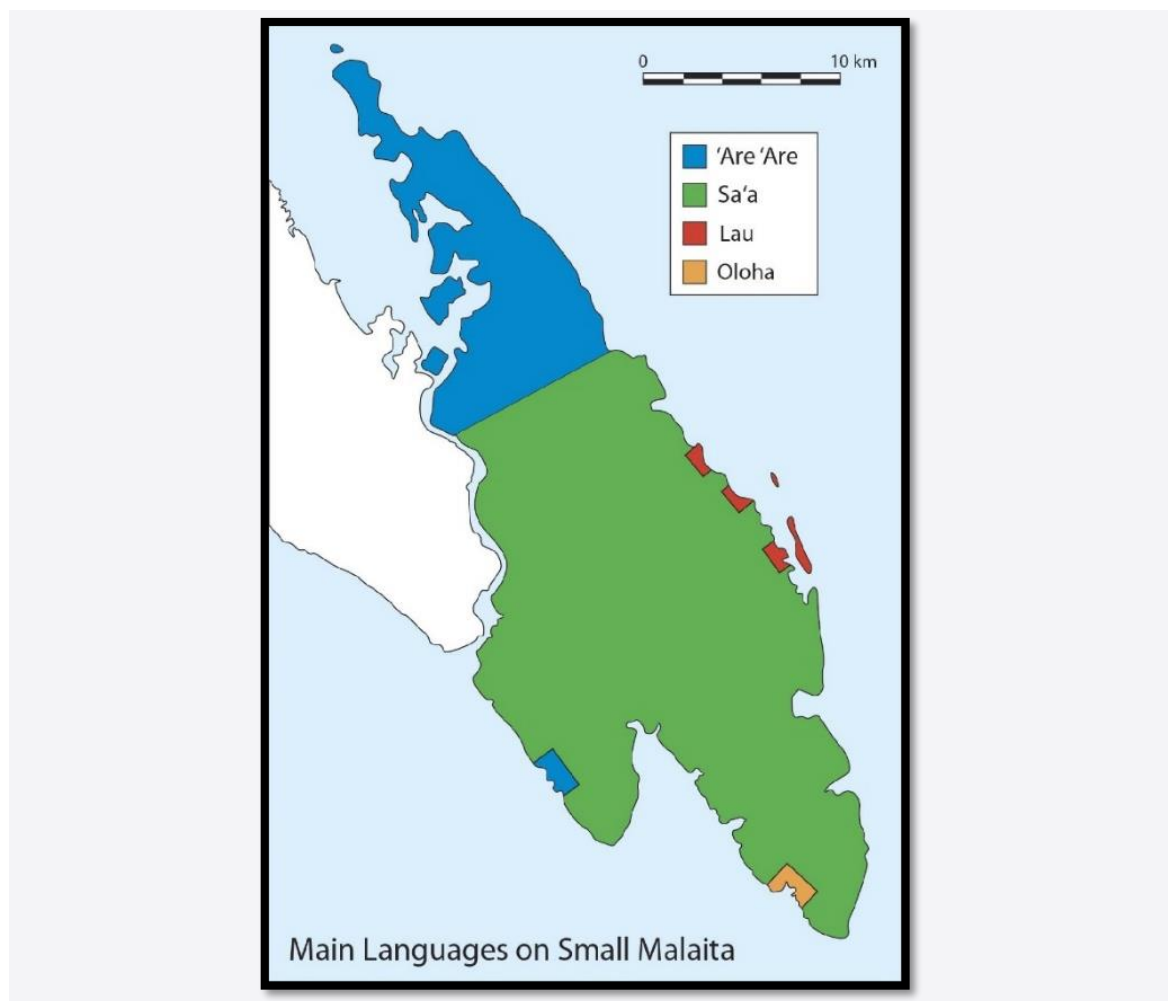


Figure 4: Main Languages spoken on Small Malaita

Source: ©Les O'Neill, Department of Anthropology & Archaeology, University of Otago, 2018.

The island has four mainstream churches, namely the SSEC, the Roman Catholic Church (RCC), the Seventh Day Adventists (SDA) and the ACOM, along with other smaller new religious revival groups. ACOM has the highest population, accounting for 35% of the people while SSEC has 17%, with the remaining percentages shared among other churches and revival groups.

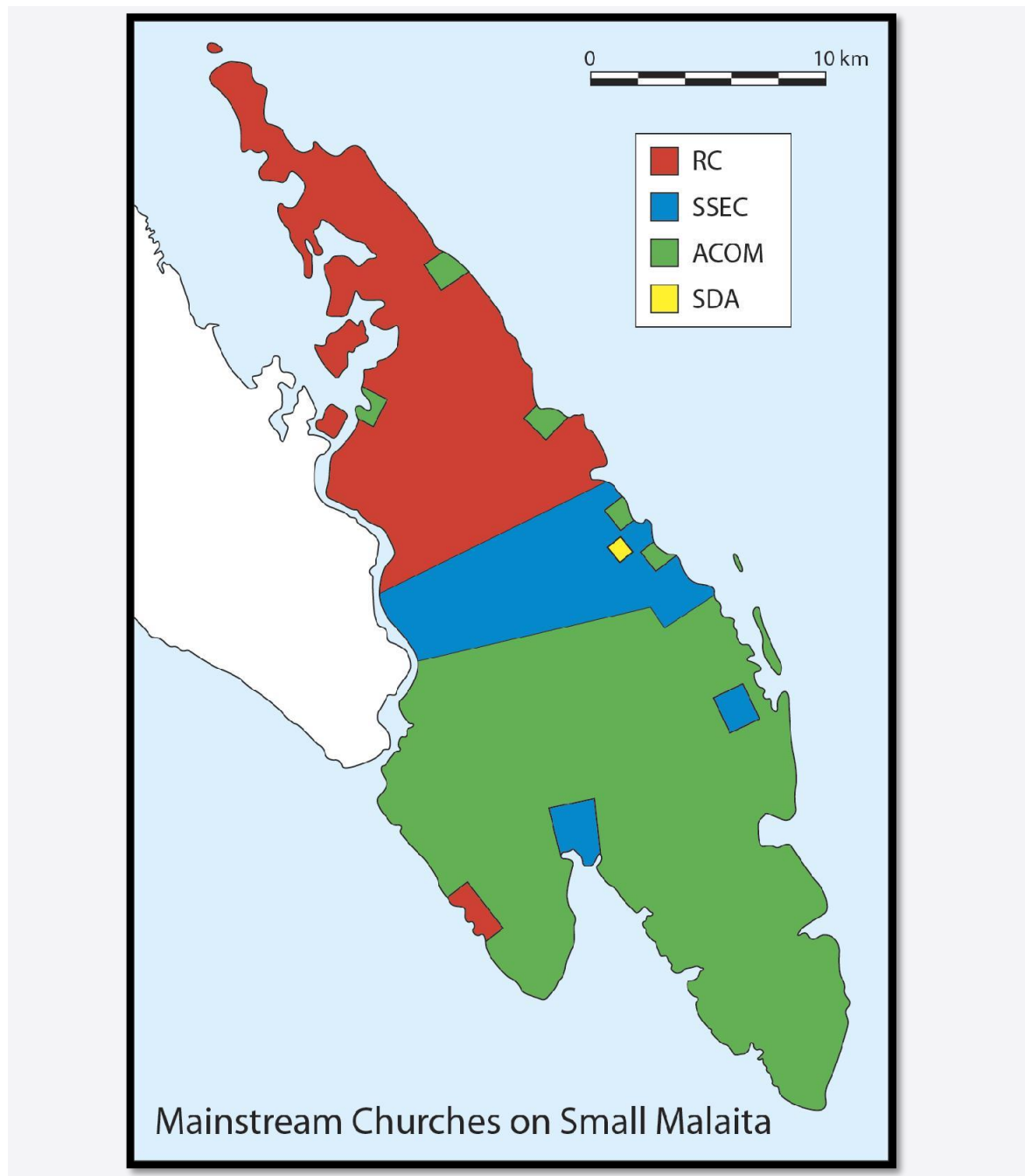


Figure 5: The Mainstream Churches on Small Malaita

Source: @Les O’Neill, Department of Anthropology & Archaeology, University of Otago, 2018.

This study covers three large SSEC communities, in Roone, Likimaea and Riverside. These communities are located within the Small Malaita SSEC Association, in the southern region according to the SSEC organisational structure.

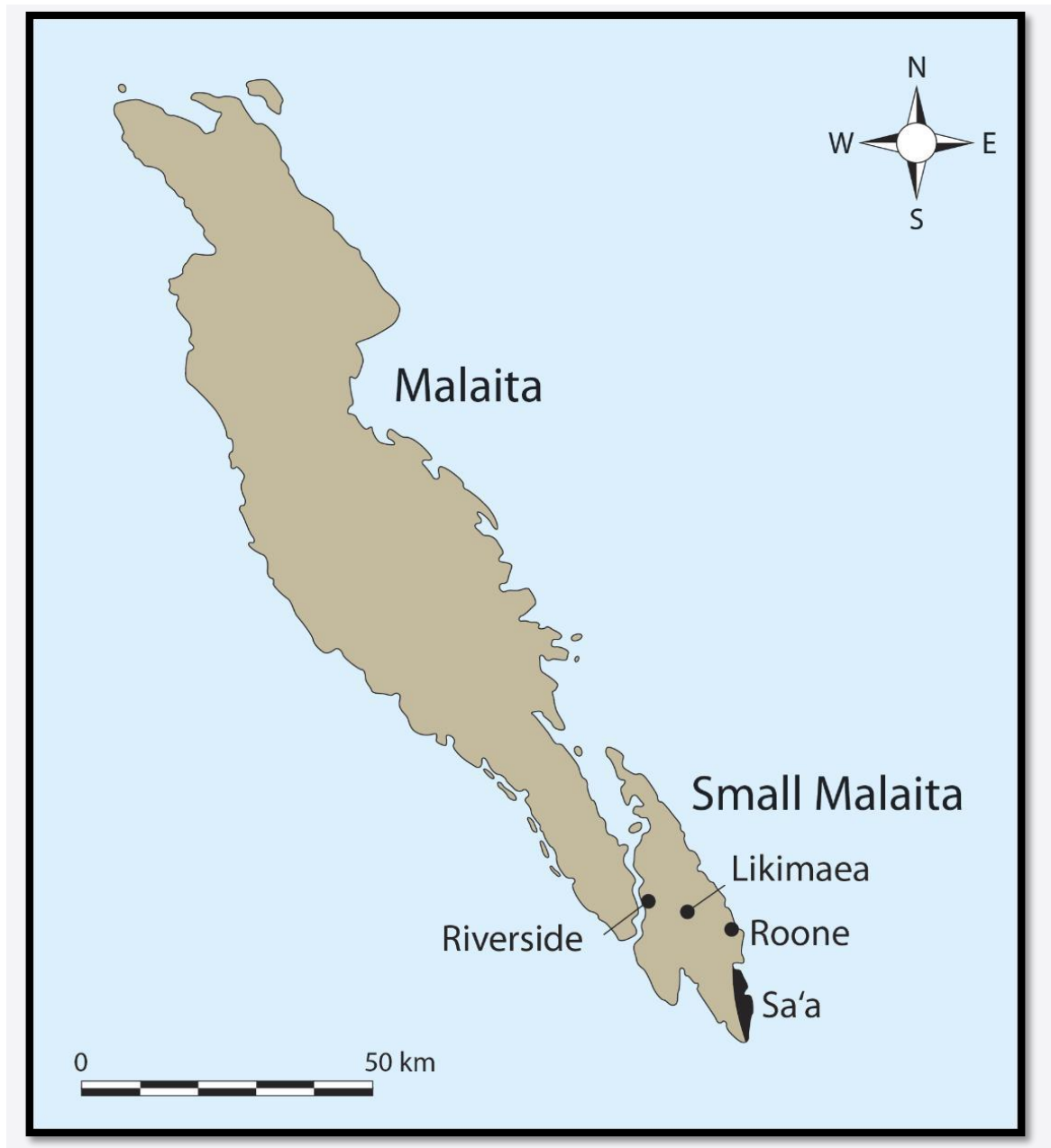


Figure 6: Research Area

Source: ©Les O’Neill, Department of Anthropology & Archaeology, University of Otago, 2018.

The choice to conduct the research in these villages, and not others, is premised on the view that these communities widely represent the various experiences and thinking of the SSEC local women. For instance, Roone is a coastal village, and is a more open community, while

Likimaea is an uphill and inland village church community relatively removed from daily connections with the travelling public. Although Riverside is enclosed by the Maramasike passage and its mangroves, the community is accessible to travel by outboard motor-powered boat (OBM).



Figure 7: Likimaea SSEC village

Likimaea located uphill in the middle of Small Malaita. **Source:** ©Ben Wate, August, 2015.

The community, however, is seen by many Small Malaitans as *hanue ni alaha* (chiefly village), the home village of the current *O'uo'uinemauri* (high chief) of Small Malaita.



Figure 8: Riverside SSEC village.

Source: ©Ben Wate, September, 2015

Like other SSEC communities, the social life of the village community of Riverside and its behaviour are strictly regulated. For instance, strict rules are imposed in the community against anti-social behaviours and dress codes. Alcohol drinking in the village is prohibited especially for men, while women are banned from wearing trousers and *lava-lava* (open-loin cloth) or other clothes worn by men that are considered as men's clothes.



Figure 9: The Roone village SSEC local church.

Source: ©Ben Wate, July, 2015

In the ACOM, the research was conducted primarily in Sa'a parish. It involved the women, especially those who were members of the Mothers' Union from Sa'a village, A'ulupeine, Daha, Mwaniadje, and U'unimenu. The plan to extend the research to Ledje was cancelled due to the death of a prominent village elder. The choice of Sa'a Anglican parish is important. Historically, Sa'a is the birth-place of the Anglican Church on Malaita, and its culture and language shape the cultural life on Small Malaita. Further discussion about this can be found in chapter four.

Indigenous Language

In this research, I undertook personal interviews with the local church women, both from SSEC and ACOM and the data collected were done in the Sa'a language, spoken in Small Malaita. The Sa'a language has a published dictionary written by Dr Walter Ivens (1918), a missionary and linguistic anthropologist in the early 1900s. A revision of the Sa'a language dictionary was undertaken towards the end of the 1980s, and a new spelling

system was introduced. This study employs both spelling systems. While it preserves the underlying meanings of the words in their original context, the study also considers the significance of clarity and the openness of the meanings to a new generation of Small Malaitans, and to the outside world of readers.

Limitation of the Thesis

This study focuses on how the two island churches, the SSEC (with an evangelical background) and the ACOM (Anglican background) with a common Small Malaitan culture, deal with gender relations in both churches, manifested in the roles women play in the local church communities. This study shows that the local women's situation and the gender relations in the church there are paradoxical. While it is evident that the low status and unequal gender relations of men and women in leadership and social life are consequential to the local cultural beliefs and of historical Christian missionary and British colonial influences, nevertheless, local church women, in their own ways continue to utilise cultural and Christian symbols for their own emancipation and empowerment both at the collective and personal levels.

The SSEC and the ACOM

Anglican Christianity, which was introduced into Melanesia in the mid-19th century, was originally a 'white people's religion', part of European civilisation, with a Victorian system of governance. The Anglican Church first set foot on Melanesian soil in 1849 when the first Melanesian young men from the islands were recruited to New Zealand by an English bishop, George Augustus Selwyn. The primary intention of the bishop was to introduce Anglican Christianity to Melanesia through 'native' teachers, who on return would be instrumental in introducing the new religion (Fox, 1958; Hilliard, 1978; Whiteman, 1983; Davidson, 1993; 2000). The pioneering philosophy of the mission was to allow the new religion to function within the structure of the indigenous cultures and to uphold its values, with the vision of transforming its object of faith, the 'White-Christ', into a 'Melanesian Christ' who could be familiar and relate well to local congregations (cf. Trompf, 1987; Tuwere, 2002).

However, the much anticipated objective of proselytism was not fully achieved. The new religion was instead modified and hybridised in the negotiation of spaces for Melanesian culture, the Victorian system of governance and Christian theology and values. Since the

independence of the ACOM from the Church of the Province of New Zealand in 1975, Melanesian male priests have occupied significant positions in the new ecclesiastical and administrative hierarchy of the church. They comprise over 97% of the membership of church synodical meetings and conferences, which have no clear constitutional provision for female membership. Instead, women take on pastoral and charitable roles to nurture Christian family homes at the domestic level. These dualistic areas of gendered influence reinscribe the tension between gendered discrimination (given the fact that women are prohibited from gaining high level leadership positions within the ACOM) and calls, at an international level, for equality between men and women as human rights and doctrinal change (whereby leadership has been opened up to women in other Anglican provinces).

At the 1988 Lambeth Conference, the Anglican Communion was challenged to raise the status of women and to consider allowing them to take up formal ecclesiastical leadership roles as priests and bishops in the wider Anglican Church. Although some women had already been ordained to priesthood in other provinces of the Anglican Communion, prior to the 1988 Lambeth Conference, the Resolution 1 of the 1988 Lambeth Conference encourages other provinces to respect those provinces who agreed to ordain women. However, there was encouragement to recognise the baptismal gift of women as a co-equal part of the Body of Christ the Church, and based on the status that women should be allowed to be ordained to any Christian ministry.⁵ Allowing women to be ordained as priests is a major challenge for the Melanesian church; priesthood in Melanesia has a complex meaning that goes far beyond pastoral leadership. The gender of a priest is culturally significant in Melanesia. It validates and gives meaning to the pastoral and sacramental roles of the priest in the local Christian community, given indigenous gendered distinctions in Melanesia.

Despite many years of advancing the Christian doctrine of oneness, sameness and gender equality in Christ, the proposition for the ordination of females finds strong cultural resistance among the church congregations in Solomon Islands. The dilemma cannot be attributed to a single factor. From the outset, however, the inclusive community life which is believed to be enhanced through the ritual of baptism, a recognised point of entry into the Christian household of faith, together with the participation in the Holy Eucharist, have,

⁵ <https://anglicancommunion.org/media/127749/1988.pdf>. Accessed on 2 October 2019.

in a way, contrasted with the imperative for gender demarcation within the church-sacred space of the household of the faithful.

In contrast the SSEC of Solomon Islands takes a distinctive trajectory in its ecclesiastical formation and order. The church is grounded in the Pentecostal and Evangelical traditions of conservative and fundamentalist principles which pronounce the inerrancy and the supremacy of the Bible as the inspired word of God. It also rejects Melanesian cultural traditions that are not compatible with church doctrines and teachings. In the same vein as the Pentecostal religious revival movement, the SSEC emphasises worship in the spirit which allows a spirit-led freedom in the church for all its members regardless of gender and age.

The SSEC was formerly an off-shoot of the Queensland Kanaka Mission (1886-1906), which was called the South Sea Evangelical Mission (SSEM) in 1906 (Moore, 2009:2). The Mission was intended for Pacific Island labourers in Queensland, and it later followed the South Sea Islanders when they were repatriated to the islands in the early 20th century. The Mission began its work on Malaita in 1904 and by 1920, it had already established several mission stations there. In 1964, its name had changed to the South Sea Evangelical Church (SSEC) and it became independent from its overseas headquarters in 1975 (Griffiths, 1977; Ernst, 1994; Moore, 2009).

The SSEC is a non-denominational church. It opposes cultural traditional practices such as bride price and traditional feasts. Strict codes of behaviour against drinking alcohol, smoking, and chewing betel nut are maintained as symbolic affirmation signifying loyalty to the Lord Jesus Christ (Ernst, 1994; Pollard, 2006; Fangalea, 2010).

Aims and Objectives

This research has the following aims and objectives: firstly, to explore the conflicts, dilemma and resistance regarding the contemporary status of women and leadership in the two Melanesian churches in Solomon Islands; secondly, to explore and appraise the Melanesian cultural and Christian theological conceptualisations of sacredness in the light of gender space in a contemporary Melanesian Christian setting; and thirdly, to appraise Melanesian traditional religious knowledge, Christian ideology, and Western religious ideas and their impact on these two Melanesian churches in Solomon Islands.

The study shows that while local culture has played an influential role in defining the roles and status of women, certain principles in Christian missionaries and colonialism have realigned the roles of women in local church communities. In this study I argue that the nature of gender relations in the Melanesian Christianity particularly in Solomon Islands is paradoxical. While local culture and churches can be oppressive and discriminate between men and women, local women have continued to utilise cultured and Christian forums to assert themselves to deal with challenges that confronted them at personal and collective levels.

Importance of the Research

This research is important to the wider anthropological literature in a number of ways. Firstly, it contributes to the literature on the anthropology of gender and Christianity in Melanesia (Douglas, 2002; Jolly, 2003; McDougall, 2003; Paini, 2003; Eriksen, 2007). Secondly, it provides a comparative emic perspective on the recent research on gender and Christianity in Melanesia by anthropologists. Thirdly, it encourages and empowers Melanesian anthropologists to articulate their local sense of culture and experience to deepen their collaboration with foreign anthropologists, strengthening and developing the anthropology of gender and Christianity in Melanesia.

Research Contribution

Important research was conducted in Solomon Islands with church women's groups towards the end of the 1990s and the beginning of 2000, by scholars in various academic disciplines, including anthropology, development studies, geography and history. For instance, Regina Scheyvens (2003), a geographer and development theorist, has conducted research on several church women's groups in Solomon Islands, covering Malaita, Guadalcanal and the Western provinces. Her research focused on church women's groups and their roles in development, both theologically and more generally. Alice Pollard (2006; 2003), a gender activist researcher, also conducted a number of studies on church women's groups in Solomon Islands and their participation in community life. She also conducted another study about the SSEC Women's Fellowship and their leadership potential in her own cultural area of 'Are 'Are, when she did her doctoral study. In Ranongga, in the Western Solomon Islands, anthropologist Debra McDougall (2003) has conducted research on the development of the United Church Women's Fellowship group on the island.

These researchers have concentrated on different cultural locations and churches in Solomon Islands. Although Scheyvens's (2003) research covers the SSEC Women's Fellowship and the Mothers' Union, her discussion is about church women's groups in Solomon Islands is general. Scheyvens' argues that local women have continued to strive and are engaged in empowerment activities despite foreign researchers' arguments that because local church women have predominately engaged with local and church based welfare obligations such as cooking, sewing, childcare and local church activities, they were disadvantaged and failed to engage in empowerment activities and processes. However, while Scheveyn's work has partly supported my proposition, her study fails to cite the paradox of local women's low status and gender relations. In this study I further extend the analysis into contemporary women's situations and I have concluded that while the influences of local culture, Christian missionary and colonialism have historically influenced and lead to the women's low status in church communities, local women have nevertheless continued to engage with local customary and Christian symbols to advance their personal and collective emancipation and empowerment.

The uniqueness of my research is marked by a number of factors. Firstly, this research provides an in-depth anthropological account of local women's church groups. Embedded in the anthropological tradition of fieldwork and the advocacy for first-hand information from local research participants, a careful approach has been made to ensure that these indigenous women's voices are clearly evident in the final stage of the thesis. Not only that, but my presence as a researcher, participating in the everyday social life of the community, and observing the performance of the women's roles in action in the village and church community life, helped me to witness women's life stories and claims.

Secondly, the uniqueness of this research is marked by my confidence and willingness as a local male anthropologist to conduct the study with local women. Recent studies were conducted by both local and expatriate women. There has been an ongoing debate (see Moore, 1988; Scheyvens & Leslie, 2000) over the authenticity of the data collected when doing studies with women, especially, indigenous women. It would be intriguing to learn the difference in analysis between 'women to women' research, and 'women to men' as some feminist scholars raise concerns over the issue of sexism and male androcentricism in conducting research with local women (Olesen, 1994; Chilisa, 2012; also see Scheyvens & Leslie, 2000).

In essence, while this is a critical issue of contention, my church leadership position has helped me to approach the research with *sae ni amasinge* (compassion) and *ha'ama'unge* (respect) for women, pastoral concern, and a cumulative approach to my priestly ministry. Further, as a church leader I am well acquainted with church structures, doctrines and beliefs, rules, canons, and the constitution. I am aware of the doctrinal and structural dilemma that the church faces in dealing with the paradoxical situation created by the local culture and Christian missionary influences. While the churches affirm Biblical and theological principles, the church is caught in a dilemma in dealing with the question of gender equality and inclusivity. Indeed, this study is enhanced by my religious and social standing in the local communities within which the study was conducted.

While the study is focused on the SSEC and the ACOM, it is not limited to the local church women's groups in Small Malaita. The experiences of the local women were articulated and highlighted, and their everyday stories and experiences within their respective local churches form the basis of this research. However, given the direct connection of these groups to the wider church structures, the research also draws on administrative and organisational structures, the constitutions, fundamental church doctrines and theological beliefs. The research acknowledges the significance of the historical missionary background of each church denomination as an effective way of probing into the dynamics that have shaped and influenced current gender relations, in particular church denominations at the local level on Small Malaita.

This research incorporates historical data from the missionary history books about the Melanesian Mission, the QKM and the SSEM. Similarly, while the thesis draws on the fundamental theological beliefs of the two churches and discusses their theological standpoints, the thesis is not a theological research project either. The research is instead informed by relevant historical, anthropological and theological discussions to analyse the significant data that is evident in responding to the research question. This study has been conducted to examine the question regarding the factors influencing gender relations within a local church setting that consequently led to the present lower status and unequal gender relations in that setting that women face in terms of leadership and in their social life. The

study further examines how women feel and deal with the situations of discrimination and oppression they face.

Thesis Structure

The thesis has eight chapters. The rest of this chapter introduces the content of the thesis and provides a summary of gender relationships in Melanesia, and the context in which the study was conducted. It provides an overview of the main thrusts of the thesis and underpins the central argument of the thesis. It states that gender relations in Solomon Islands Christianity is paradoxical. It is noted that local culture, Christian missionaries and colonialism have played instrumental role in defining the status of women. Nevertheless, local church women have often used local culture and Christian agencies to assert themselves. Chapter two provides an outline of the research methodology used in the thesis. This research has embraced qualitative research methodologies, using a number of techniques to collect the necessary data. The reason for choosing a qualitative methodological framework is built on the objective view that anthropological study of people demands a collaborative approach, whereby a researcher collects data through one's social interaction with the cultural groups under investigation. The concern for rural women's experience and voice to be heard in the final analysis of this research is significant, and treated as a priority. Hence, the methodological framework was designed to address this. Feminist scholars' concerns for local women are highlighted here, one of which is the power structure that exists between a male researcher and local women research participants. The chapter also deals with the general research concerns of indigenous research protocols, and the influence of the status of the research insider/outsider that has the potential to influence the overall analysis.

Chapter three provides the background context to contemporary gender relations and conditions in Solomon Islands. It discusses the social status of women and describes the different roles that men and women play in society. It outlines the employment rates of women in both government and private sectors and women's participation in politics, and describes the roles of women in the church. It also discusses the social conditions of women, specifically examining rates of violence and levels of gender-based discrimination. The chapter also discusses human rights ideologies and the complication of local women utilising the ideologies and functions for the protection of women from discrimination and violence. There is a discrepancy between global notions of rights and gender equality

advanced by the Lambeth Conference and provinces that now ordain women, and the ACOM that prohibits such leadership. It provides an overall description of the general context of local women's lives and experiences.

Chapter four presents the historical profiles of the SSEC and the ACOM. It begins with the historical formation of the SSEC from the QKM in the late 1800s through to the era of the SSEM and the official formation of the SSEC in 1964. This includes coverage of the fundamental beliefs and guiding philosophies of the QKM. These concern the mission's views on indigenous customs. A brief discussion focuses on the training of local women, the formation of the girls' Bible schools, the *Fiku ana kini* (women's group/fellowship) and the participation of locally trained women in SSEM/SSEC. Further detail is given on the SSEC foundational Christian doctrines, church constitutions, and organisational and administrative structure. Special attention has been directed to discussion over the participation of SSEC women in leadership and decision-making.

The chapter moves on to discuss the history and founding philosophies of the Melanesian Mission, the missionary objectives and the mission syllabus and training strategy for the local women. It also provides information regarding the formation of the Mothers' Union, its objectives and work. Further details about the ACOM study are provided, including its organisational structure, church doctrine and constitutions. An observation on the roles of women in leadership and decision-making in ACOM is also documented.

Chapter five provides a survey of the relevant literature. This chapter reviews and evaluates approaches to, and debates on, global gender relations and draws on contemporary and historical accounts of gender in the Pacific region. Attention is drawn to discourses on Christian domesticities and the subsequent missionary-inspired roles and influences on current gender relations, particularly women's participation in churches. Further discussion examines debates about women's empowerment and agency. Women in Solomon Islands do experience inequality and subordination, but pathways to empowerment remain, as evidenced by their participation in the SSEC and the ACOM. Overall, gender relations in Solomon Islands Christianity is paradoxical. The literature has shown that while local culture, and Christian missionary and colonialism have been instrumental producing the subordinate status of local women, they have used local cultural and Christian forums as agencies of empowerment to deal with their personal and collective challenges.

Chapter six discusses the contemporary gender relations in the SSEC and the ACOM. It begins by highlighting the initial missionary approaches to training of local women. It describes and documents local women's experience and observations in the church through personal interviews. The chapter discusses the female-gendered stereotypes particularly on local women in relation to leadership roles in the church. The discussion shows that while there are existing variations between the two churches, it is clear that formal leadership in the church such as church pastors, ministers, reverend bishops (SSEC), deacons, priests, and bishops (ACOM) are restricted to men, while women's leadership is exercised significantly in the Women's Fellowship, and in the Mothers' Union. Nevertheless, at the top level, the senior authority of the ACOM attempts to deal with the roles of women by providing specific pathways and career development opportunities.

Further discussions draw on local agencies of empowerment which women have utilised in the process of dealing with socio-cultural and political constraints, both in the home, and in the local church communities. Church women's groups are agencies of local women's empowerment. This is where women are taught and encouraged, and their lives are shaped in dealing with everyday social life, both in the household and in the wider community. As a result, SSEC women's empowerment is built on the simple biblical and theological teaching that they learn in the Women's Fellowship. They perceive the power to advance and deal with life based on the vision and meaning of *Masta* (Master) rather than human rights ideologies. Similarly, while local ACOM women utilise lessons learned in the Mothers' Union about God, unlike SSEC women, they also incorporate some knowledge of human rights awareness, and the local culture. This approach has enabled the members of the Mothers' Union to be effective both inside and outside the church.

Chapter seven provides a comparative analysis of chapters four and six. This chapter analyses the major differences and similarities of the two case studies. The discussion shows that the historical background of the founding missionary agencies of the SSEC and ACOM largely shaped the view of the church about the roles and status of women in the church. On the one hand, the QKM, emerging from the SSEC, was founded by the evangelical vision and outlook of Christianity, which is both simple and non-denominational in structure, with a particular focus on spiritual salvation. On the other hand, the Melanesian Mission which is derived from the established CHURCH OF ENGLAND, is highly structured with a broader holistic outlook of the roles of Christianity.

These structural orientations affect the manner in which both churches view their mission and the local people's cultures.

More significantly, the discussions in this chapter highlight the different ways in which the local church women's groups reassert themselves. The SSEC women have invoked the virtues of their personal Christianity, *hu'e maa'i* (Christian woman), as a form of agency to deal with the social challenges confronting them, while the ACOM local women have used the cultural and maternal virtue of *teitee maa'i* (holy mother) for similar reasons. The discussion draws on the contradictions found in the two churches in relation to fundamental beliefs, church rules and the treatment of their own women's membership.

While these differences do exist, the women in both churches have experienced some elements of subordination. The status and the roles they perform in their respective churches are unequal. Nevertheless, using their own agencies, these local women have continued to reassert themselves in their own ways and deal with everyday social crises both domestically and communally.

Chapter eight, the conclusion, provides a summary of the thesis. Despite the foundational and doctrinal differences of the SSEC and the ACOM, the local women of both these churches are unable to experience conditions of equality, sharing the same privileges, social space, and respect that enable them to assume formal leadership positions in both churches. Local women's leadership roles are only evident within the periphery of the domestic sphere. It is evident that the intersection of local culture, Christian missionaries, and colonialism have played an influential role that marginalise local women in their subordinate status in local church communities. However, as argued here, gender relations in the local churches are paradoxical. Despite the poor social scenario that women face, the situation does not in any way imply that local women are passive and incapable. Local women have continued to utilise the local culture and Christian agency, reasserting themselves and embracing their own strategies of negotiating their empowerment. The chapter considers possibilities for future research, cautioning potential researchers to be sensitive to indigenous cultural protocols when conducting research with local women.

Conclusion

Discrimination against women and the unequal gendered relations in terms of work and leadership is prevalent in Solomon Islands Christianity. Nevertheless, the agency and determination of local church women for empowerment has not been weakened by the degree of suppressive situation they face every day and the challenging circumstances in which they work. Women have continued to seek for their own empowerment strategies. This chapter has provided an overview of the dilemma that the church has encountered in pursuing its Christian vision as a liberating agency to enable the equality of God's people, men and women. In essence, the church has been challenged by the local culture, and the historical missionary, and colonial dynamics that have continually influenced the church from realising its vision. The restriction of women from attaining positions of leadership within the formal structure of the church, based on their gender is aligned with the local cultural beliefs and the historical dynamics that reinforces the notion of Christian domesticity which sees women's leadership roles as appropriate to the Christian domestic environment. Culturally, there has been a strong opposition to women's leadership in the church, arguing that women's nature is profane and that women are not permitted to sacred spaces or to perform roles that require standing in front of men. Christian missionary teachings also reinforce male leadership, appealing to Biblical teachings that emphasise patriarchal authority in the church. This patriarchal legacy has advanced the belief and tradition of having women subordinate to male leadership through performing roles that consequently advance Christian domesticities. Overall, gender relations in Solomon Islands churches is paradoxical. While local women have experienced discrimination and subordination within their respective churches, it is evident that women utilise cultural and Christian notions of social justice and equality to assert themselves and deal with challenges at the personal and corporate level.

Chapter 2: Research Methodology

Introduction

As researchers, “we carry our own values and worldviews, to a greater or lesser extent, into our own research” (Creswell, 2007: 35). Our perceptions are shaped by our previous experiences and knowledge, which we use to view, capture, and analyse data, and construct a story from it. Consequently, there is a risk that our pre-conceived ideas may introduce bias into the entire research process, thus Creswell suggests one of the procedures for enhancing the credibility and trustworthiness of the research is to clarify the potential bases for this bias.

I begin by offering an introduction to my background experience and position within the social setting in which the study has been conducted. I present a series of reflexive narratives on the constraints of doing research in an indigenous setting as a local researcher. I draw on the issues of the dynamics of power relations to consider doing research as an academic and church leader who has a privileged position of authority, in respect to local women. These narratives are discussed in dialogue with discourses and literature on positionality in ethnographic research among women within the indigenous context. It is followed by a presentation on the research design and an outline of research methods being used, the data analysis method, and a discussion of University of Otago human research ethics processes. The research for this thesis was conducted in two churches: the ACOM, and the SSEC. It was conducted with the Mothers’ Union group in the rural parish of Sa’a in the Anglican Diocese of Malaita, and with the Women’s Fellowship of Small Malaita SSEC Association.

The Researcher in the ACOM

I began in chapter one, introducing myself, the training that I had undertaken in order to attain and enhance my leadership position as a priest in the ACOM. But it is important to further discuss the previous roles I held in the church in discharging my leadership roles in the last 20 years. I have served at different levels of leadership in the church, some of which included working as a parish priest in both rural and urban parishes, as a Vicar

General⁶ and as Diocesan Mission Secretary⁷ in one of the dioceses. For some years, I was a member of church committees and boards, including the ACOM General Synod, which is the highest decision-making body of the church.

Pursuing research, I held a teaching position in the church's theological college and was also assigned to be coordinator of a theological education review within the college suggesting reform strategies for the church to implement. In this role, I designed a policy framework for the decentralisation of the diploma in theological education to the dioceses and established three additional institutions: the Schools of Theology and Ministry (STM). These offer study alongside the Bishop Patteson Theological College (BPTC), the main theological institution of the church, which offers the Bachelor of Theology Degree programme. One significant aspect of this review concerned the syllabus for women's development studies. This involved obtaining the opinions and suggestions of the clergy wives who came to train alongside their husbands as to what areas they preferred as appropriate and were most necessary in their roles as priests' wives. This was the first time the ACOM involved women in planning to decide their training priorities themselves. In the past, rules and policies governing their participation in the church were always decided without women's opinion or consent.

The Researcher and the South Sea Evangelical Church (SSEC)

The SSEC is very different to the ACOM. Although I did participate in a number of the ecumenical activities with the SSEC and collaborated well with some of its local pastors and elders, I am aware of the contentious doctrinal differences between the two churches. For instance, the SSEC practises adult baptism. This requires adults who are mature in the Christian faith to verbally profess repentance before they can be baptised. In contrast, the ACOM focuses on infant baptism. The ACOM will only baptise adults if they convert to the church, but not if they marry in from another church. The SSEC rules that adult Christians who were baptised at childhood in their own churches be re-baptised when they move into the SSEC as a result of marriage or for other reasons. On some occasions, Anglican women who married SSEC men were obliged to undergo rebaptism as a mark

⁶ By the Canons and Constitution of the Anglican Church of Melanesia, the position of a Vicar General is a senior position within the diocesan organisation, an immediate subordinate of the Diocesan Bishop and often takes over the bishop's administrative responsibilities when he is away from the diocese.

⁷ A diocese is a canonical jurisdiction within the Anglican Church under the pastoral authority and oversight of a bishop. The Diocesan Mission Secretary heads and oversees the mission work of the diocese and works alongside the bishop.

of transition from the ACOM to SSEC. For instance, Mary (pseudonym), a secondary school teacher who became a member of the SSEC through marriage, expressed how she was pressured to be re-baptised by her SSEC local pastors and minister when she first arrived in her marital village but declined on the grounds that she believed in one Christian baptism, and not re-baptism (Interview, Mary, 6 September 2015). Her case was resolved through advice given by a prominent SSEC senior minister of the Asimeuri Association, the *Alaha O'uo'u* of Small Malaita. Although the church minister's decision did not satisfy the SSEC's strict rule regarding admission and rebaptism of new adherents from other churches entering SSEC through marriage, Mary's case was resolved through respect for the minister. Reverend Timothy is an elder brother of pastor Edwin Ahukela (one of my main research participants) who is pastoring the local SSEC church and is relieving Timothy's chiefly roles at Riverside. The minister's pastoral handling of Mary's cases can be viewed against two factors. First, the minister had studied overseas under the leadership of an Australian Anglican priest and may have been influenced by the Anglican Church especially on the theology of sacraments. Secondly, as a *Alaha O'uo'u*, Timothy holds deep respect for *tolahani inoni (kastom)* and the local tradition of inter-tribal relationships and hence, value great respect for chiefs within other churches on the island, including the ACOM. Mary's case was resolved through these influences and protocols. In the final analysis, Small Malaitan traditional and cultural respect encoded by *tolahani inoni* plays a dominant role in dealing with issues of conflict between the church and cultural traditions.

This has provided an explanation of my knowledge about the doctrinal differences and existing contentions between the SSEC and the ACOM. As a local researcher who is an Anglican, originally from Small Malaita, I am aware of the challenges that could potentially influence my position to subjectively provide bias reporting about the information being collected about the SSEC women's lives and their personal stories, out of differences of opinion with the SSEC because of these church differences.

Positionality of Researcher in Ethnographic Research

Reflecting and clarifying one's position and experience in fieldwork is a fundamental obligation in anthropological research. This research has significant challenges in positioning itself in two research contexts within which there are rising criticisms and tensions about how a particular research is conducted and the power relations that are

involved in field research (see Abu-Lughod, 1991; Narayan, 1993; Davies, 1999; Patton, 2002) especially in indigenous contexts among women. In this case, this research is critical in two scenarios. First, the research was conducted by an insider/indigenous researcher who has aligned himself with the local culture and social context to which he has lived and has been fully immersed. And secondly, the research has been conducted by a male academic and church leader of one of the mainstream churches being studied here - with the local women in rural context of his own island home of Small Malaita. It is an imperative to reflect on my positionality against the backdrop of these realities, and to address the questions of positionality, impartiality, credibility, justice and respect especially to the local women that I did the study with.

There has been an assumption that research or investigation has always been done to “something outside our selves” (Davies 1999:3) and the knowledge obtained from the study cannot be gained through self-examination. This theoretical assumption has been critiqued in recent scholarship. For instance, Davies (1999) has pointed out that all researchers, to a certain degree have connected partly to the object under investigation. Hence there is a challenge as to whether the result of the research is characterized by the researcher’s presence and influence on the research process (Davies, 1999:3; see also, Patton, 2002). This is an important point I consider regarding my research with local women in my indigenous setting. Reflexive methodology is vital in this study. Reflexivity is defined as the research mode of “turning back on oneself, a process of self-referencing” (Davies, 1999:4). This methodological approach is a vital process in this study given the two critical context that have challenged me in this study.

I will provide a series of reflexive narratives at different stage of the complex scenarios briefly introduced above. The narratives entail a process of self-referencing on how the dynamics of binaries of ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ positionalities and, gendered power relations that have challenged me and how they were addressed during field research.

In her book *Decolonizing Methodologies*, Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) suggests that institutional academic training can compromise the ability of indigenous researchers to do justice to their findings given the asymmetrical complexities between both environments. The researcher is caught between the binary positions of the two worlds of the “insider and outsider” (Smith, 1999:135-142).

On the one hand I am an insider. I was born in Small Malaita into a family of five and both of my parents are from A'ulupeine, a village within the cultural zone of Sa'a which is the indigenous language I speak. I was raised to adulthood within Small Malaita, was taught the culture of the place and its ritual protocols of respect, and I was oriented to the cultural expectations that I should uphold as an adult. As a married person, culturally my household is assigned certain responsibilities that I should appreciate and perform without being told. As a villager, I learned much important knowledge from the elders about the cultural arrangement of the clans of the village and the local culture of the place. This includes the traditional mythical stories, genealogies and the traditional names of my tribe and its function within the larger structure of Small Malaita political organisation, called a *iola* (canoe). I also participated in the rituals of mortuary feasts, and seasonal food and first-fruit harvests. My grandparents and parents taught me about the gender restrictions and relationships; hence, I have sufficient knowledge of the cultural rules governing male behaviour towards women, which are referred to as *ha'ama'unge* (mutual respect) (cf. Smith, 1999; Pollard, 2006; Teiawa, 2015; Maezama, 2016). Although I have been away for lengthy periods from Small Malaita due to study and work commitments, I always returned during Christmas vacations and I have a family house, a garden and other property that an ordinary village man should have. This personal introduction affirms me as an "insider" of the Small Malaita community where I have undertaken my research study.

On the other hand, I am also an outsider. My outsider-ness refers to my educational background, professional career, and work experience, developing a shifting worldview that has become instilled in me through my Western formal education (see Smith, 1999) in Solomon Islands, the Pacific, and in Europe. Although I did my secondary and theological education in Solomon Islands and Fiji, the syllabus, the language of instruction and the ideological frameworks were Western and English oriented. Even though the locations of some of the educational institutions were in indigenous settings, the style and form of education diverged from the local cultural setting. The influence of social interactions in these academic learning environments, and my participation in international⁸ and regional conferences and meetings also played an important part in the

⁸ I attended Rokera Provincial Secondary school from 1983 to 1985, then Solomon Islands College of Higher Education in 1986. I completed a Diploma in Theological Studies at Bishop Patteson Theological College, Solomon Islands studying there from 1990 to 1993, I attended the Pacific Theological College in Suva, Fiji,

development of my perspective on life and my consideration of issues occurring globally and locally (See, Narayan, 1993, Smith, 1999).

My priestly ministry in various parts of the ACOM in Solomon Islands has had some bearing on my perspective and thinking as well. As a parish priest, church administrator, and theological educator, I have interacted with people of different cultures, and shared discussions with colleagues, staff and students, which gave me an enormous challenge in ruminating on ideas and my outlook on life.

The journey that I have been through, in many ways, shifted my worldview of life from where I started out in my local and indigenous cultural context. Although not actually disoriented, every time I go to the village I see the setting, the local people's discussions and ideas, as new and strange. There are advantages and disadvantages in both insider and outsider perspectives. Anthropologists who are outsiders may have difficulty understanding the insider's society but are better able to take a comparative view from experience of their own society. A researcher who combines both experiences should be able to combine the best of both worlds.

In view of Creswell's (2007) and Smith's (1999) observations about the positionality of the researcher in mind, I began this chapter by unpacking my position in the context of my field research. I declared my position as composite: I am both an insider and an outsider with an ethical responsibility. The positionality of a researcher is critical in qualitative research methodology. It is premised on the neutrality of the researcher's attitudes towards the researched subjects and their social world and the process of data collection and analysis. The declaration of the researcher's position mediates the binary oppositions of subjectivity and objectivity, a measure on which credibility and validity of a research and data analysis is judged (Patton, 2002). Patton (2002; also see, Davies 1999) notes that critics of qualitative enquiry have suggested it is too subjective because "researchers are instruments of data collection and data interpretation, having personal contact with and getting close to the people and situation under study" (Patton, 2002:50). He argues that

from 2002 to 2004. I also attended the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) from 2007 to 2009. I attended a theological hermeneutics conference at Lautoka, Fiji, in 2001. I also attended an Anthropology conference at Cambridge University in 2013 and advised the National Museum of Scotland on a research project on Malaita. I have been based in Auckland and Dunedin for my postgraduate studies since 2015.

fieldwork often engages a researcher with people and involves her or him emotionally in the problems under investigation. He goes on to observe that ethically, the possibilities will depend on the nature of the enquiry and the perspective of the researcher (Patton, 2002:50).

However, Patton (2002) argues that the terms objectivity and subjectivity have been given negative connotations and “become ideological ammunition in the methodological paradigm debate” (Patton, 2002:50-51). He suggests a departure from the binary opposition and terms of “subjectivity versus objectivity” to “trustworthiness and authenticity” (Patton, 2002: 51). Here, the researcher’s aims are balance, fairness and completeness. Patton (2002:51) suggests the strategy of “empathetic neutrality as a way forward, taking a middle ground between becoming too involved and maintaining distance”. For Patton (2002:51), “neutrality does not mean detachment”, but combining attachment to the people and their context with balance, fairness and coherence in one’s collection of data and analysis.

I follow Patton’s “empathetic neutrality” strategy in reflecting on the positions I took concerning the outsider/insider oppositions during fieldwork. It is not so much the dichotomy of positions but the quality of the relationship between the researcher and the researched community that is important (Narayan, 1993). Critically, both positions bear their own advantages and disadvantages for the researcher’s approach to the field of investigation. The terms insider/outsider are fluid categories of positionality rather than binary fixed positions (Jackson, 1998; also see, Narayan, 1993). They are useful categories depending on how they are used. Jackson (1998) raises an important point for personal reflection, and of course I have felt the effect of the fluidity of my position as an indigenous researcher during fieldwork in my local context.

During the field research I experienced the inter-changeable and shifting positions between insider and outsider positionalities. Although they offered me a challenging situation, they proved to be useful for my research. I had a rather complex set of research social contexts. First, I did my first fieldwork among the Mothers’ Union of Sa’a parish, my Anglican home parish, where I knew people well and was familiar with the problems faced by the women of the Anglican Church. I was an insider there. Then I did my research among three SSEC local communities with the Women’s Fellowship of a church that I am

not a member of. Here I was an outsider. Broadly, thinking about Small Malaita as the cultural context in which the research was conducted, I claim myself as an insider but being a PhD anthropology student who studied in New Zealand, doing research in Small Malaita gave me a feeling of an outsider.

As pointed out by Smith, (1999) and Narayan, (1993) there will always be an experience of non-fixity or the shifting categories of a researcher's cultural identification realised in the course of conducting research. This is due to the influence of "education, gender, sexual orientation, class, race or sheer duration of time contacts" on the researcher (Narayan, 1993:671-672). Eventually these factors, at different times outweigh the cultural identity accorded with the 'insider' and 'outsider' positionality, and reproduced as a "*halfie*" (Abu-Lughod, 1991:140) researcher. At certain points, I felt like being split between two worlds, or

a person of dual nationality, an inner white European in Melanesian skin.⁹ This is due to the many opportunities that I lived and studied outside of Solomon Islands and interacted and adapted to western culture and ideas, with my family. To a certain extent, I agree with Abu-Lughod, (1991); Narayan (1993) and Smith, (1999) regarding the non-fixity, and *halfie* experience of my position, however, I can still sense my indigeneity as a local of Small Malaita. I had watched the painful experience of my mother labouring to feed, clothe and maintain the survival of the family, while at the same time, working and living to the expectation of the cultural community and the church. Being part of the family and growing up with that experience, I am fully immersed in the sociological and psychological spectrum of rural village family life. My village experience and knowledge of culture, and women's experience, compared to an outsider researcher, would not be the same. This is not to invalidate the data collected by an outsider researcher, but overall the data would not contain elements of the indigenous psychology and sensitivity.

Language is a significant component of culture and doing research among indigenous communities. A researcher is required to learn the local language in order to understand content of research participants stories. Language is multi-layered and is spoken to multiple levels of audience. It is framed with social and cultural psychological symbols and meaning. Hence, learning a foreign language as a vehicle to communicate and to

⁹ For comparative reading on the seminal post-colonial critique of this dilemma, see Frantz Fanon. (1952).

gather data in field research does not take a foreign researcher deep enough to grasp the socio-psychological meaning of words spoken in an indigenous cultural context. My field research was conducted in Sa'a language, my maternal language, and I had the privilege and the capacity to decode meanings and symbolic terms spoken to express the lifeworld's of my participants when they spoke on issues that require cultural sensitivity. In positioning myself as an indigenous-insider researcher, I do not intend to merely compare or overstate the difference that an insider researcher is capable of representing the genuine and reliable data of his or her indigenous community, but significantly to establish a position, that I have a particular privileges that can be utilised in indigenous research. Yet, both the researchers, insider and outsider's reports carry valid representation of the community under investigation but from different stand-points. Both researchers are *halfies*, in a non-fixed or fluid positions.

Smith (1999) further elaborated on the disadvantages of the insider position when an indigenous insider is doing research in his or her cultural context. Indigenous researchers can sometimes become too involved in domestic matters that consequently trouble the positive psychology needed for the research. I have discussed these constraints in earlier sections. The researcher becomes so involved and so close that he or she loses a broader perspective of the cultural field under investigation and the research becomes so influenced with empathy that the reporting of data is compromised. Furthermore, indigenous researchers could run the risk of ignoring important information, key terms and the social setting because they assume they know what people think and experience because they have lived in the society under study.

In doing field research, I have encountered the challenge of boredom in enduring long hours of listening to women's participants' stories. The content of their responses to my interviews seem to carry old and common stories that I assumed I was aware of because of that they did not appear new to me and exciting to arise new enthusiasm in the research. This had created an environment of boredom. Yasmine Musharbash (2008) drawing from the work of Svendsen's (2005) explained that there is a theoretical distinction between boredom as a "reaction to certain things or events and being bored as a state of being" (Musharbash, 2008: 309). Two types of boredom are evident; "situative boredom," and "existential boredom" (309). "Situative boredom, on the one hand, is the kind of boredom one experiences, for example, while waiting or in a lecture; it is often expressed bodily

through yawning, sighing, doodling, and general restlessness and distractedness. An overload of things or events as well as a deficiency of them can lead to this type. Existential boredom, on the other hand, is an all-encompassing boredom where the individual is bored in- dependently of or detached from the world around them.”

(Musharbash, 2008: 309). While my experience of boredom could be defined as ‘existential boredom’, I was not unconsciously removed from the world of which I am part of. My experience of boredom was solely based on the timely nature of the local narratives communicated to me. Boredom in this sense, was not because they were women, but because of my close association with them and my experience of village life in Sa’a parish. To ensure that they recognise my due respect to them, I constantly nod my head and smile, gave approving words such as “*true nao*” (it’s true) or *ia man* (of course) every time they spoke of the stories that I knew about. These experiences occurred because I grew up there and had strong cultural and social connections with the local people. Nevertheless, I ensured that their stories were recorded with respect. These field experiences were true when I did my research in Sa’a parish with the members of the Mothers’ Union there.

This has contrasted my research encounter with the SSEC local women. Although, they are local women of Small Malaita, being a member of the Anglican Church, I can feel the distance mediated by my church affiliation. While I felt connected as an insider due to my cultural connections and language, speaking to the SSEC women I could feel the urge to listen attentively with enthusiasm especially when the women spoke of their church experiences, and drew on biblical and theological knowledge, and interpretations in relation to their life challenges. Comparatively, the women’s stories and personal reflections appeared fresh and different to me. The difference is consequently influenced by the nature of relationship I have with them, particularly regarding church affiliations and the proximity of my position.

However, being an insider already with first-hand experience of people’s lives, feelings and social life is also an important advantage. Understanding the key terms of cultural expression in normal day to day life is an advantage and privilege that an outsider does not have. My research among the ACOM Mothers’ Union of Sa’a parish was enriched by my knowledge of the culture of the people, protocols, the use of the local language, and my knowledge and experience of the ACOM. Being an insider gave me easy access to the female participants of the Sa’a Mothers’ Union as most of my participants knew me well,

and I was familiar with the cultural protocols of approaching and speaking to different categories of women, so the participants had no reservations in speaking to me. For instance, in the village, conversation usually started with betel nut chewing. Even though I usually prepared the ingredients for my research carry-bag when visiting my women participants, when approaching a house, I would give signal such as “*eh!*” or a mild cough then ask them “*nga ho e’e akue*” (do you have any betel nut?). Such utterance opens the way into someone’s house and signals a situation of confidence and trust for the participant before any important conversations would occur. Usually, with married women, I had to give a joke to their husband when entering the house. However, I was reminded as well that I was an outsider. When I arrived at Olusu’u, our seaport, people would address me as *Mamaa ni Niu Silan* (father from New Zealand). In most cases, my relatives and friends would enquire about my studies and the culture of the *mwala ni haka* (white people) of New Zealand. They would want to know if I brought some extra mobile phones and wrist watches as gifts and much of our conversation was about New Zealand digital goods and software. These questions always reminded me that I was an outsider.

My presence and position during the fieldwork among the SSEC was as an outsider. First, I was a newcomer to the SSEC villages, and although many people knew of my name and had heard about me when I arrived, I could see many people waiting to see me on my arrival. In the evening, the chiefs, church pastors and elders often visited me and wanted to hear stories about my study in New Zealand, but they also wanted to hear stories about my trips to Europe especially. At Likimaea and Riverside, I was asked to preach to the SSEC congregation on Sunday. Although I was hesitant because I knew that as researcher I needed to sit with the congregation just to observe the conduct of the service, I had to accept their invitation with respect. Their reasons for requesting me to preach were simple. First, because I had been studying overseas it was assumed that I had a better understanding of the word of God (Interview, Onesmus, 27 July 2015). Secondly, the congregation wanted to hear a new voice in the pulpit. One of the pastors told me that the local congregations were tired of hearing the same old voice and that they would be very happy to hear a new voice, especially someone who came all the way from New Zealand.

As an insider in these communities I had the advantages of having easy access to chiefs, elders, church leaders and women participants of both the SSEC and ACOM. The cultural context, the traditional practices of gender restrictions, better knowledge of the key terms

and symbolic terms and local narratives of the people were familiar to me. Although I faced some constraints, because I share the same cultural context and had experienced the common difficulties of livelihood with them as an insider, I always felt that I had a deeper relationship with them that eventually led me to present their case in a fair and balanced manner. My insider-ness invokes inter-subjectivity. Yet I was also an outsider. During my research, this position helped me to carefully listen to my participants and try as much as possible to relate to them in such a way that they would have confidence in me. This was because I had the view that I was ignorant of the local church women's organisations and their personal life in the context that I was going to study. I realised in this research that the beneficial aspect of being both an insider and outsider was that it had created a relationship of trust and confidence between myself and my participants.

In retrospect, I have stated in my experiences, how I felt about my research participants, the people I met, and what I saw in the local research environment. However, it is difficult to ascertain as to whether my claims and observations are valid given the fact that the people I have met, spoken to and interacted with have different views about me, my position, education and personhood, and conclusions about the importance of my study. What I have stated was my perspective. It has always been the cultural ethics and mode of showing respect in Small Malaita, and generally in Melanesia, that people will not honestly tell a guest or an important visitor that they are not happy with him or her, and to a certain extent, when asked they would give information that is conveniently positive to ensure their guest is not offended. They would respond with positive remarks but in reality, they may have negative feelings. This cultural tendency might have some impact on my study with the local women in the SSEC and ACOM, which needs to be admitted.

Researcher among Women and Feminist Concerns

Researchers are faced with the challenge of whether, conducting a particular research either within one's gendered group, or across gendered groups, can be impartial (Moore, 1988; Scheveyns & Leslie, 2000). While this could be a dilemma for researchers, the way one's relationship of trust and respect is forged with a gendered group, either within or across, is significant. For instance, while Margaret Jolly (1989) studied the space of women in South Pentecost, she also did a lot of research with men. Lissant Bolton (2003;

2007) spent more time with women and gathered quality information with women's groups in her research in Vanuatu.

Nevertheless, a number of theorists and feminist critics have alleged that male researchers are biased and androcentric when conducting research among women. For instance, Robson (1993) observes that there is tendency for sexism in qualitative research. Women are potentially seen through men's eyes, applying male paradigms to women. "Male researchers ... are using male criteria to measure standards to judge the behaviour of women in terms of social status" (Robson, 1993:64). Olesen (1994) and Chilisa, (2012) warned against androcentric attitudes, sexism, reflexivity and the power dynamics that often play out in their research. Concerns are raised, complaining that the "real voice" of the women was unheard so that data collection and analysis is tinted by a male worldview and experience. Furthermore, feminist scholars are concerned about the aims and purpose of the research and wonder whether women will have some direct benefits from them (see Olesen, 1994: 158-169). Past lack of "concern for women often creates inevitable bias in the structures of academic disciplines, the theoretical frameworks that inform research practices, the methodologies, the methods, the fieldwork, the analytical frameworks and the reporting strategies" (Chilisa, 2012: 259-260; see Olesen, 1994: 159-166).

As a clergyman and PhD student in New Zealand, I am very much aware of the power dynamics entailed in my roles in relation to the women participating in my research. It is very unusual in Solomon Islands for a clergyman to do doctoral research among women. The usual trend has been for women rather than men to study women (see Pollard, 2003). Being married, I often frame the management of my family activities and social life in the rather strict gender roles of my culture so that this could be a base for bias as well.

While feminist scholars' arguments may be true, there is a need however, for a review of the criticism especially in the church context in order to obtain a balanced view of the argument. It is important to note that not all male researchers in leadership positions hold such negative views of women. From an indigenous experience as a church leader in Small Malaita and Solomon Islands, priests, church ministers and pastors are not only spiritual leaders but also social workers who support women and families in crisis. For women confronted with domestic violence or other social problems, a minister/priest or a pastor would often be the first person to consult or the very person who would appear at the scene

of a crisis. On many occasions in the village, a clergyman or pastor's home has been the safe haven for women who seek refuge. These ecclesiastical leadership positions may appear oppressive in some circumstances, but on many occasions, they are helpful to women in rural communities.

My academic status and gender were challenged and moderated in the field. I was not seen as an anthropology researcher but more as a visiting clergyman or church minister on a pastoral visit to women. My academic status as a male researcher was located and situated within the SSEC and ACOM ecclesiastical and pastoral framework. I was addressed as *Mamaa* (father) during the field research by women on Small Malaita, and the SSEC and ACOM elites that I interviewed addressed me formally 'Father.' All the members of the communities where I conducted my interviews, including women and children called me by the church title *Mamaa* and I was often greeted and welcomed in language such as '*moning Mamaa!* *Plis Mamaa kam inside long hoas* (morning Father, please father come inside). As they positioned me within a flexible social context under the ethics of *ha'ama'unge*, I reciprocated, addressing my participants in appropriate kinship terms according to age and status-*mwasine* (sister) and *teitee* (mother). These fictive kinship references reinforced the relationship of mutual trust to create a pathway for seeking better understanding between the researcher and participants. As noted by Rochelle-Lee Bailey (2014) doing fieldwork in Ambrym, Vanuatu, relationality was vital in accessing local knowledge and places and entailed appropriating a fictive or fluid relationship of kinship to allow her access to research participants (Bailey, 2014:12). In Small Malaita, the research was predicated on the cultural ethics of *ha'ama'unge* or mutual trust.

Although local women could trust me, I found that there were certain matters which were confidential to them and could only be shared with other women. These concerned subjects which were considered taboo in custom. Women would not discuss them with me as a male, because that would be considered disrespectful. My fieldwork was highly mediated by gender as it is for many anthropologists.

It is important to note that the specificity of the research context and furthermore power relations vary with a certain level of sensitivity in different cultural contexts. Indeed, as I have stated earlier people normally don't tell the truth and are reluctant to speak their minds when they are not happy. This is true for Small Malaitans, especially women. While

I realised that my position as a church leader and also an academic person imposes unequal power relations and that I may have appeared authoritative to women, as I have stated earlier, the recognition of my pastoral role as a priest may have bridged the gap. As Narayan (1993) has pointed out, the dichotomy of power and the focus on position and identity of researchers needs to be removed and the focus shifted to emphasise the quality of the relationship with particular people under research. Imbalances in power relations would be not solved through an emphasis and critique of the gendered dichotomy but far more on the quality of relationship of trust between the researcher and the researched.

Indigenous Concerns and Research Approach

Indigenous research methodology is grounded on the philosophical assumptions that indigenous knowledge is sacred, and is built on relations. It is socially constructed and owned by people (Smith, 1999; Nabobo-Baba, 2006, also see, Chilisa, 2012). Smith (1999) and Nabobo-Baba (2006) argue that Western culture and an academic research approach stand in contrast to the indigenous approach for acquiring knowledge. On the one hand knowledge is sacred and owned by the community as a life-long gift that should only be passed on to its members through highly ritualised protocols (Nabobo-Baba, 2006). Communal knowledge should be grounded in indigenous perspectives for their benefit (Smith, 1999; Gegeo, 2001). On the other hand, universities and modern academic institutions are responsible for universalising research methodologies that are self-essentialising, far beyond the cultural protocols of knowledge dissemination. Failing to adhere to culturally standard protocols of obtaining knowledge without any benefit due to the researched community is “stealing” (Smith, 1999:91; see also Quanchi, 2004).

As I have stated, knowledge and ways of knowing are sacred and communal. Knowledge is based on relationships. Therefore, the manner in which knowledge involves sensitivity is to show respect for the opposite sex, older people, and adopt the proper manner for entering a village and a home (see Gegeo, 2001; Nabobo-Baba, 2006). Knowing the village traditional organisation and genealogies is vital, because that will affect the language of communication and the use of proper titles. Although in Small Malaita there were no highly ritualised protocols similar to those in Fiji discussed by Nabobo-Baba (2006), the ethics of *ha'ama'unge* take precedence in community life among both villagers and visitors. This begins with one's knowledge of the clan, knowing the suitable language and terms of address to use for different categories of men and women (unmarried,

married, and elderly) before moving on to learn values of sharing and behaviour patterns in various social and cultural spaces in the village, both private and public.



Figure 10: Ben Wate poses with *O'uo'u inemaui*, Ainimae O'uo'u

The *O'uo'u inemaui* of *Korutalau* peine, the founding tribe of Small Malaita. **Source:** ©Ben Wate, July 2015.

The vital point to this protocol is the knowledge that a village-space is *hanue ni alaha* (chiefly village). As far as the village is concerned, church leaders such as pastors and priests are under the chief's protection and hence have subordinated roles under his leadership. I was fully conscious of this protocol, and I had to write a letter to the *alaha* (chief) of each of the villages that I had to visit, and had it copied to the parish clergy or pastor in charge. Although in most cases the chief could read, a close relative could read and translate for him. Literacy does not matter but the protocol of *ha'ama'unge* is significant. In contrast to some Pacific cultures, in Small Malaita chiefs do not insist on elaborate ceremony. In my field-trips, I realised that none of the *alaha* would object to my research. In certain villages, I was met and greeted by the chief on the path to village. In some, the chief would visit me in the house I stayed in during the evening to greet me and seek to do *'oohoung* (story telling) regarding my visit to the village. For the elderly chiefs, I set a time to visit them as a matter of *ha'ama'unge*.

Maurice Punch (1994) has pointed out the advantages for both young and adult researchers. He observes on one hand, that “young student researchers may be perceived as non-threatening” (Punch, 1994:87-88) but “adult researchers over-40s with advancing age and increasing status could open doors for fruitful enquiry...” (Punch, 1994: 87-88). In Small Malaita, young student researchers would be under constant public scrutiny because of assumptions that they had no experience in life and could not show *ha'ama'unge* as they think much more of themselves. Young Western student researchers normally could not be trusted as local people normally watch videos and movies of young Westerners showing too much familiarity between them, which is an offence against the culture of *ha'ama'unge* in Small Malaita. However, I hold that knowing the culture of *ha'ama'unge* and learning to build relationships of trust with local people will open many doors of enquiry. I have stated that indigenous research frameworks are built on mutual respect, a prerequisite to establishing relationships which is fundamental to research in an indigenous setting. As an indigenous researcher, I ensured that my field research complied with the framework of *ha'ama'unge* in Small Malaita.

Research Methodology

This thesis adopts qualitative methodology which is compatible with the interpretative paradigm which I have selected for this research. This differs from quantitative methodology which measures reality and knowledge through the use of numerical information and statistical data. Qualitative methodology examines social and cultural values which are difficult to measure. It engages with people's life experience as expressed in language and cultural symbols. Researchers enter the world of the researched subjects to gather data through collaborative relationships (see Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Chilisa, 2012). Qualitative research methodology also use “positivist paradigm” which explore social reality based on knowledge that better understanding of human behaviour through observation and reasoning (Braun & Clarke, 2013:29). Qualitative methodology assumes that there are “multiple versions of reality or knowledge”. It is underpinned by the epistemological assumption of “legitimate knowledge and enquires what knowledge is meaningful and can be trusted” (Braun & Clarke, 2013:28). Due to its “ontological and epistemological nature, qualitative research deploys a wide range of interconnected methods to capture knowledge and meanings expressed by social actors in the real world through their actions, including words and images” (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994:2). I use

qualitative methodology that has a relational dialogue between the researcher, the social actors and their real world.

Fieldwork and Research Methods

Because of the nature of qualitative methodology in seeking knowledge, it engages a range of interconnected methods to capture the subject matter under study (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994:2). Indeed, the process is conducted through the framework of ‘fieldwork’ in which a researcher is immersed in the ‘field’ of study to gather data using multiple methods. There is a relational and collaborative approach between the researcher and the researched. Patton (2002:47) sums it up well, stating that “qualitative data...takes us as readers into the time and place of observation so that we know what it was like to have been there. They capture and communicate someone else’s experience of the world in his or her own words”. Fieldwork is therefore, a standard qualitative method for gathering information.

Fieldwork

I made two fieldwork trips to Small Malaita in Solomon Islands to collect ethnographic data for this thesis. The first field-trip was conducted in February and March 2015 in the ACOM parish of Sa’a on the south-eastern coast of Small Malaita, among the Mothers’ Union organisation. I then engaged in another field-trip from July to September in the same year among the Women’s Fellowship groups in the three main SSEC communities, of Roone, Likimaea, and Riverside. Roone is on the south-eastern coast of Small Malaita, a few kilometres from Sa’a. Likimaea is about seven kilometres inland in the middle of the island, while Riverside is located on the southwest of Small Malaita, further inland along the Maramasike passage.



Figure 11: Likimaea SSEC village in the highlands of Small Malaita.

Source: ©Ben Wate, July 2015.

Sa'a was chosen because it was the birthplace of the ACOM on Small Malaita and it also has a reputation of keeping strong cultural traditions compared to other communities on Small Malaita (see Ivens, 1972). I had several reasons for the choice of the SSEC communities. Roone is the largest SSEC community on Small Malaita, a mixed community with most people having intermarried partners from different cultural groups and islands, where a number of new religious revival movements can be found. Likimaea is a closed community located far inland with little access to transport where people mostly live by subsistence. Riverside is a community where culture and the SSEC traditions are well maintained. It is also the home of the island's paramount chief.

In Sa'a, there were no difficulties in travelling to the villages. I used to walk from one village to another and stayed there for a period of one week and then moved on. I did my field-trip for the SSEC villages from July to September which was unfortunately the season of stormy south-easterly trade winds in that part of Small Malaita. For all the SSEC

villages, I had to travel by outboard motor (OBM) to Roone and Riverside. Two men accompanied me as bag-carriers. It took about three hours to get to Riverside, and for Roone about 45 minutes. Likimaea was the most difficult village to reach. The OBM trip took us one hour and forty-five minutes along the coast and then we took a bush path up into the mountains across valleys and cliffs to reach the village, a journey of about nine hours. Following people can be tiring and risky. On certain occasions, I had to postpone travel to the SSEC villages because of bad weather and high seas. During one trip, the OBM was hit by a huge wave that almost sank the boat, but we were saved by the captain's expertise. Nevertheless, it was a fulfilling experience for me as it fulfilled my quest to reach my research participants.



Figure 12: Disembarking from an OBM

At Bulu mangrove passage before walking uphill to Likimaea SSEC village. **Source:** ©Ben Wate, July 2015.

The choice to study these two women's organisations, within the SSEC and ACOM and not others was premised on a number of factors. Firstly, they function under the two mainstream churches whose doctrines, liturgical practices, and views on the roles and functions of the church in society differ considerably. Consequently, they have contrasting organisational structures and leadership models, which reflect their own historical and

ecclesiastical practices and traditions. Secondly, the two churches have divergent historical approaches to the roles of women in church and in society. Thirdly, they have distinct doctrinal views on traditional culture. These characteristics are reflected in their church women's organisations.

One of the prominent lines of difference is that the SSEC is an evangelical church which holds very strong views of the inerrancy of the Bible. To the SSEC followers, the Bible is the 'mouth-piece of God', the absolute standard for human salvation (Ernst, 1994). By contrast, the Anglican Church holds the tripod system of belief, in that while "Scripture" (Bible), is foundational to salvation, tradition, and reason are significant to summon in order to understand Scripture correctly. Here one can see that ACOM takes a more accommodating line, and places a high value on the historical traditions of the church, and the human faculty for reasoning, together with the Bible (*ACOM Manual*, 2014). These doctrinal differences have a substantial impact on women in their socio-economic and spiritual lives and provide a useful basis and rationale for a comparative case study approach.

Returning to one's indigenous homeland, people and cultural context to do research as a clergyman and as a researcher studying abroad, has both advantages and limitations. On the one hand, much of the anthropological literature on fieldwork has focused on non-indigenous researchers researching 'strangers' in unfamiliar contexts (for discussion see, Punch, 1994; Marshall & Rossman 1999; Patton, 2002). In some cases, these researchers are instructed to follow certain ground rules and methods for negotiating entry into the field to acquire knowledge about the people under enquiry. On the other hand, there is a small but growing literature on Pacific Islands indigenous students' fieldwork in their own communities. For instance, Gegeo (2001) did his fieldwork among his paternal cultural group, the Kwara'ae people of Malaita; Thomas (2013) undertook research in Vanuatu; Nabobo-Baba (2006) did her fieldwork among her kin in Fiji; Teaiwa (2015) followed persons and phosphate from, to and between Banaba (Kiribati), Rabi (Fiji), Australia and New Zealand (all countries and islands where her people and their key mineral commodity and entangled others have voyaged, settled and returned to and from) and Smith (1999) among Māori indigenous women in New Zealand. In the Pacific, there were different protocols of passage, ranging from a ritualistic ceremony to simple rituals (Teaiwa, 2015). However, generally in Solomon Islands, there are no such ceremonies to permit or

introduce researchers to their fieldwork locations, but people take a great interest in why and what the researcher is there to study. This presents a mix of privileges and challenges. On a positive note, I knew that I would not be confronted with much difficulty negotiating entry into my field of research as there was a natural feeling of acceptance in welcoming home a member of the 'village-elite' who had been living overseas but had maintained his ties to the community (see for comparative discussion Gegeo 2001). My re-entry into my own home communities, and those of the SSEC were not complicated and did not engage any rituals of passage as was the case with Fiji and with Māori, (cf. Smith, 1999; Nabobo-Baba, 2006; Vaka'uta, 2011; Teiawa, 2015;). The Small Malaita society emphasises *ha'ama'unge* (mutual respect) and a researcher entering Small Malaita village communities should be fully conscious of that. *Ha'ama'unge* requires a researcher to be sensitive and act in such a manner that honours people's culture and customs, and to be aware of one's relationship with the people and community. All indigenous Small Malaitans, including myself, or any visiting researcher, are expected to understand that they are entering *hanue ni alaha* and that what is required is consciousness of the rules of respect. Fundamentally, what is meant is that in all social actions the overarching value of respect and honour should be accorded to individuals irrespective of a visiting researcher's social status and gender.

However, the constraints of a conflicting set of social and cultural obligations in one's home environment and the demands of kin on an indigenous researcher can be very stressful in meeting the requirements of academic research (see Smith, 1999). I stayed in my home village and commuted to other villages to do my fieldwork. On a number of occasions, I was confronted by cultural obligations and church responsibilities which challenged me. Two bride price ceremonies were held in my village during fieldwork. Apart from contributing money and two sets of *ha'atahanga* (fathom of shell money), I took part in preparation, such as cutting firewood and baking *ha'apo'e* (a local pudding), for the ceremonies. In the village I attended several community meetings, and on one occasion, I was asked to give some technical advice to the village elders who at that time were settling a land dispute between two neighbouring clans in our home village. In addition, as a clergyman I was often asked to officiate at Sunday Eucharist and to offer

pastoral services to villagers who were in need when I was visiting.¹⁰ It was difficult to turn down these requests and pretend to be an anthropology student by ignoring my roles as a local villager and a clergyman. However, as an indigenous researcher and a church leader familiar to the people, I had no option but to remain honest to my local identity and negotiate trust as an open-door for enquiry.

There were similar constraints in the SSEC villages where I did my fieldwork. These involved cultural obligations toward relatives and friends. At times my relatives would visit me bringing food and later sat to tell stories. For instance, I had kin at Roone and Riverside, two of the villages I visited. After I arrived, they visited me and brought food, so I could see an obligation on my part to reciprocate by giving some small amount of money. I also met up with good friends, including some of my former schoolmates, and some would take up our meetings with funny stories of early school days and request stories of my visits to European countries. We would sit there for long hours in the evening and I had no time to have enough rest for the next day.

Dealing with the required cultural obligations and church responsibilities while on fieldwork was a challenging experience. However, while this may appear as a constraint on my research, these are realities of social life that support shared relationships with people. This is a challenging and practical issue for indigenous researchers as they manage the family and socio-cultural obligations, and visiting friends (see Smith, 1999). The challenge is to manage these relationships so as to provide pathways for the collection of research data (see Patton, 2002).

Case Study Approach

I used two case studies with multiple methods for data gathering in this research. Stake (1994) notes that the “case study is not a methodological choice, but a choice of object to be studied. We choose to study the case and could study it in many ways” (Stake, 1994:236). In this research I chose established women’s church groups as subjects of study, based on my interest in how each church deals with women in respect of gender inequality and questions about subordination and empowerment in church communities. It is an “instrumental case study” set to pursue understanding of each woman’s group as a

¹⁰ I was asked to officiate Eucharist at Sa’a, and A’ulupeine village. And on one occasion, I preached and co-conducted a funeral service at Lede within Sa’a parish.

“bounded unit” (Stake, quoting Louis Smith, 1978), and to engage a comparative analysis of Solomon Islands women’s experience in two Christian communities.

One of the advantages of case study research is that it focuses on a “bounded system” where a researcher studies specific conditions, including the historical background, physical setting, and its socio-economic and political context. It draws attention to the question of “what specifically can be learned from the single case” (Stake, 1994:236). The benefit of the comparative case studies I conducted among the SSEC and the ACOM women’s organisations, was that I was able to draw specific responses to particular questions based on the women’s Christian denominational worldview and commitments. Here I discovered how the level of influence of denominational indoctrination on women can produce a theological base as a powerful agency for women’s thinking about their lives and empowerment (cf. Dickson-Waiko, 2003; Pollard, 2003) influenced spirit-based agency and empowerment. It gave me an opportunity to learn about the views that had not been heard in the ACOM, my natal church.

This research used a number of interview methods. Much of the data collected for this thesis was drawn from interviews. A total of 53 participants were interviewed: 28 were from SSEC, and 25 were from ACOM. In SSEC, 23 women were interviewed and five male church leaders. For the ACOM 20 women were interviewed together with five men. These interviews were conducted alongside the established fieldwork and systematic participant-observation. Some interviews were conducted during the day while others had to be done at night. On Small Malaita, female participants consulted their husbands in deciding a convenient time and location for the interview. In the SSEC, most of the women chose to have their interviews in the church building while a few chose their own homes. In Sa’a parish, women wanted to have their interviews either in their own, or in their friend’s homes. Interviews were normally conducted within a maximum period of 45 minutes. All interviews were digitally recorded with a few photographs taken of participants. In most cases, local participants wanted photos taken of themselves, and some put on their best clothes with traditional women’s ornaments for the shots. Later, longer periods were spent sharing betel nut, tea and food with more ‘*oohoungē*.



Figure 13: A member of Roone SSEC Women’s Fellowship at an interview session

Source: ©Ben Wate, July 2015

Marshall and Rossman (1999) quoting Kahn and Cannell (1957) describe “interviewing as a conversation with a purpose...a useful way to get large amounts of data quickly” (1999:108; see also, Silverman, 2000). However, while he theorises interview in this way, I feel that this method itself cannot fully grasp the interview data but has to be supplemented with indigenous methods. Thus, I complemented the data collection by using the story telling method, a semi-structured interview method, to guide how the questions were asked and then managed the responses obtained from the individual participants (see below). I did the semi-structured interviews with women of both groups.

The terms “research” and “interview” were perceived differently by participants. Further explanation had to be done and the noun ‘interview’ had to be discarded. For instance, a number of Mothers’ Union participants asked about the financial benefit I would receive for doing the interviews. Monica (Interview, 19 February 2015), continually asked, *e nite mei to’oha okei tole’i ana oko esu ngeena* (how much would you receive for the work you are doing). On the other hand, in the SSEC, my participants suggested that my research in their villages was a mission outreach programme to help women. Because women were

singled out as the focus of my research, there was a great expectation for me to visit all the SSEC Women's Fellowship groups. In August 2015, after I finished my fieldwork at Likimaea SSEC local¹¹ church up in the highlands of Small Malaita, I was told that a village pastor and the members of the Women's Fellowship at a neighbouring village, Korutalau, complained that they had not been invited to attend the 'mission training' that I held at Likimaea. They argued that 'they too thirst like other women for the Word of God'.

Prior to my departure from Likimaea the women made two puddings (*monatele*¹²) and on the day we departed they approached and gave them to us saying, "*Missoni o aehota, melu kei nii alihoi ana, ana halisweune*" (the mission you have started will be returned to your village next year). These local perceptions of research and interviews reflect the impact of colonial and missionary activities in Small Malaita in the early twentieth century when white European colonial officers and missionaries often arrived in villages with suitcases of mixed goods, books and papers and talked to people. This had some impact on the interviews. While women responded well to my questions, they seemed interested to know more about life in big cities overseas, especially of food, the transportation and people's wealth in New Zealand. Rural Small Malaitans thought that a similar activity conducted by a local clergyman studying overseas like myself or a foreign researcher could involve money and goods or a special evangelical mission outreach. I took the SSEC women's statements seriously as in Small Malaita custom their gift had to be reciprocated.

I also conducted what Marshall and Rossman (1999:113-114) describe as "elite interviews" focused on those considered to be influential, prominent, and/or well-informed people in an organisation or community. They are selected for interviews on the basis of their expertise in areas relevant to the research. Generally, this refers to those who hold authority in particular organisations, who know the policies, past histories and the future plans of the organisation (Marshall & Rossman 1999:113-114). In the SSEC, 'elite interviews' were conducted with the Vice-Bishop and the National Co-ordinator of the SSEC Women's Fellowship who were based in the SSEC National Headquarters in Honiara. Three of the prominent local pastors of the SSEC Associations Asimae and

¹¹ The English term "local" has been historically used in all SSEC village churches.

¹² Traditionally, this kind of pudding was given to high chiefs during the yam and taro harvest seasons to mark the opening of the harvest season annually in June and July.

Asimeuri in Small Malaita, in Roone, Likimaea, and Riverside SSEC local churches were interviewed. Two appointments were made to interview the Bishop of the SSEC at the SSEC headquarters in Honiara, but because he was busy, I was referred to interview the Vice-Bishop. This is one of the main disadvantages of elite interviews. “It is often difficult to gain access to elites because they are usually somewhat elusive and busy people operating under demanding time constraints; they are often difficult to contact initially” (Marshall & Rossman, 1999:113-114). However, the level of assistance offered by the Vice-Bishop, who is the immediate subordinate authority of the SSEC, has greatly enriched the study.

In the ACOM, I interviewed the Archbishop, the Senior Bishop (second in authority), Bishop of the Diocese of Malaita (DOM) (where the research was conducted), the General Secretary (CEO), and the Mission Secretary. I interviewed the President of the Mothers’ Union who happened to be the wife of the Archbishop. Alongside her was the Diocesan Mothers’ Union worker of the DOM. The Diocesan President could not be reached as she was too busy. Several attempts were made without success.

Although Marshall and Rossman (1999) observe that the elite interview can be challenging to the researcher due to the positions that elites hold in organisations, I noticed something quite different to their observations. The church officials, men and women of both churches were quite cooperative, but also hesitant, and always enquired as to whether they had answered the questions correctly. At the end of each interview, most of them asked me “*hao me ansam gud ogeta kwesten ia? Me no save me ansam gud o nomoa* (Do you think I have answered the questions well? I am not sure whether the answers are good or not). In one sense, such a statement could mean that the elite interviewees were not fully aware of the issue of research and were nervous and hesitant about the nature of information they gave. However, in Solomon Islands, it is part of the cultural protocol to say that one does not get it right, although they know they have given quality answers.

I did not encounter any major challenge over the questions and discussions I had with the leaders of both churches. Instead, most of the information they gave me were genuine testaments of the challenges their respective churches are struggling to address. The interviews were conducted in their own office spaces with more time given for interviews,

followed by the sharing of jokes. This research has benefited from the knowledge and intelligence of the church leaders of both SSEC and the ACOM.

***'Oohoung*e (story telling)**

Small Malaitans effectively share important information through *oohoung*e. *'Oohoung*e is an informal conversation much used in everyday social life. People could *'oohou* (to tell story) at the beach, while working in garden, fishing or at home. However, it can be done formally on special occasions, especially by elders. *'Oohoung*e is similar to *talanoa* in Fiji (Nabobo-Baba, 2006). However, although informal, those participating in *'oohoung*e could be drawn from a wider cross-section of the community on certain occasions. It is often accompanied by betel nut-chewing, which motivates people to express themselves; however, this is not a necessary ingredient to engage *'oohoung*e. This is quite different to *kava* drinking and *talanoa* in Fiji (see Nabobo- Baba, 2006, also see, Fairbairn- Dunlop & Coxon, 2014). Betel nut-chewing is different in the manner it is chewed. People chew individually and do not necessary sit in a circle arrangement to *'oohou* like in the case of *talanoa* around the *kava* bowl in Fiji. People would chew betel nut and then enter into the rhythm of *'oohoung*e. In *talanoa* conversation, one is customarily required to sit around a *talanoa* (Toren, 2005; Tomlinson, 2006; 2007; Mataiviti-Tulavu, 2013) bowl to ceremonially drink *kava* before and during the session. In Small Malaita, *'oohoung*e can proceed with betel nut.

Due to the constraints encountered in the formal interview setting, I had to reserve some time after the interviews to provide space for *'oohoung*e. I discovered that this post-interview conversation approach was very effective and beneficial. I could sense the true-selves of the female participants emerging through gestures of smiling and laughing as they deeply expressed their views and feelings of what they thought to be the right response to my interview questions. In the Anglican villages, the women participants loved to share their betel nut and the ingredients (pepper-leaf and lime) while the *'oohoung*e was in process. This sparked off lively conversations with deeper expressions of personal feelings. In the SSEC villages, *'oohoung*e was normally held after the formal interviews and involved serving tea and food. In many ways, *'oohoung*e has set the platform for better understanding of the inner-selves of the women participants by shifting the participants from the formal space created by the scientific method of interview to a

more informal space to gather better knowledge and understanding of what was said in the formal interviews.

Participant Observation

Participant observation was a fundamental part of data collection during my fieldwork. The presence of the researcher in the field of study is an imperative in social research that cannot be ignored or separated from the science of enquiry. It is an interpretive approach where the researcher attempts to understand what is observed, heard and felt in the field to construct meaning through being present and interacting in the world of the researched community. This is in opposition to a 'positivist' approach where the presence of the researcher in the field is needed to prove a hypothesis.

Being in the field as a researcher, as an active participant and observer in the two consecutive fieldwork trips in Small Malaita demonstrated to me the imperatives and roles of an academic anthropologist. Although I am an indigenous person from the area, where I hold the assumptions that I am familiar with of the Small Malaita people and their local culture, by being present as an academic and anthropologist in the field during these field-trips, I came to realise that I had learned something new; a new vision of my social context, a new feeling for relationships, and a new sense of old village stories which appeared afresh within my consciousness. This resonated with Marshall and Rossman's observations when they suggested that:

...participant observation demands first-hand involvement in the social world chosen for study. Immersion in a setting allows the researcher to hear, see and begin to experience reality as the participants do. Ideally, the researcher spends a considerable amount of time in the setting, learning about daily life there. This immersion offers the researcher the opportunity to learn directly from his [or her] own experience of the setting. These personal reflections are integral to the emerging analysis of the cultural group of interests (Marshall & Rossman, 1999:106).

During my field-trip to the three SSEC village communities from July to September 2015, I spent a number of weeks in the communities to observe the daily lives of the women in the villages. I attended the church services to observe the seating arrangements in church, where men mostly sat to the right and women on the left. I also observed the roles women performed during the church services and their expressions of worship during services. I

spoke to them about how they felt about their positions in church, and the spiritual and social links between church-spiritual life and everyday social life.

To fully grasp the participation of women and their positions in SSEC local churches, I planned my visit to the villages to arrive on Saturdays so that I could attend the service on Sunday. While my plan was to observe the women in the church setting, I was asked by the local village pastors to preach at the service. I preached at the main Sunday services at Likimaea and at Riverside.



Figure 14: The author preaching at Riverside local church on Father's Day Sunday.

Source: © Ben Wate, September 2015

I could not preach at Roone since the local church was commemorating the arrival of the SSEM on that Sunday. I felt that I should not refuse this invitation but instead took it as a participant observation in the SSEC sacred space. I believe that my invitation was made for two reasons. First, I felt that the SSEC pastors and chiefs wanted to accord me with respect because of my leadership position in the ACOM, hence it would be proper to invite

me to preach to their respective congregations. And secondly, based on my present status as a local PhD student studying in New Zealand, the local SSEC congregations would expect to hear some new knowledge from the Bible to share with them. I could not hide my social and religious identity as a priest. People know that I am an Anglican clergyman (for a comparative discussion, see Punch, 1994). It was an advantage to my research that my trusted religious status, the invitation and the opportunity to participate in worship as a preacher allowed me to enter the people's world. There were certain data which could not be collected through verbal methods. It could only be obtained through participation in social activities.

Focus groups

I conducted four focus groups to collect data. One was held at Sa'a among the Sa'a Mothers' Union, and three were at the three SSEC local church communities. In each group, six participants were selected to form part of the focus group. This method was found to be very useful in establishing common opinions and feelings about women's experiences in their respective churches. Mostly, like other Melanesian women, local Small Malaita women are sometimes very shy to speak and express themselves unless someone else can show signs of affirmation to what they say.



Figure 15: Focus group discussion at Sa'a

Kare, a member of Sa'a Mothers' Union clarifies a point during the focus group discussions. **Source:** ©Ben Wate, 2015.

However, focus group interviews can be very difficult to manage. This can often happen when participants discuss a pressing issue. I also discovered that during the focus group sessions, women had engaged in wider discussions drawing on various issues of interests, and enquiring on a possibility of obtaining funding assistance from New Zealand to complement their efforts for village based-self-sustaining projects. Although at some points I had to redirect them, nevertheless, their openness to discuss and express their views freely is beneficial to this research. The importance of this space and time was shown by the women who chose to have the focus group held in the church away from the view of the men.

Document Analysis

I accessed and collected a number of important documents and books from the SSEC and ACOM which were very useful to the thesis. Marshall and Rossman (1999) observe that documents about a particular group are useful in developing a better knowledge of the setting and the group studied. They supplement other data collection methods (Marshall

& Rossman, 1999:116). When I interviewed the SSEC women and the church leaders, they often referred to the fundamental statement of faith of the church and used certain standard interpretations of specific Biblical texts. The one I heard much about was the Pauline text on the *wife's submission to husbands* in Ephesians 5. I could not understand them well until I obtained a copy of the SSEC Constitution, a book containing the church's mission statement, the history of the church, and a published book, *Fire in the Islands* by Alison Griffiths (1977). The book concerned the spiritual revival within the SSEC on Malaita in the 1970s and is a key document for this thesis as it describes the spiritual revival movement intended to strengthen people's Christian faith, and exorcise ancestral spirits, and witchcraft which were believed to be practised mostly in Small Malaita. Furthermore, the revival attempted to confront traditional cultural practices of the local people (Griffiths, 1977: 89-100).

As an Anglican clergyman, I had access to digital and hard copies of the 2014 revised Constitution, and other documents containing the general guidelines of service for clergy and lay employees. The Mothers' Union president gave me the manual and a copy of the organisation's structure, and other reports that were presented to several church board meetings in 2014. One of the important documents which I obtained from the Mothers' Union was the report to the ACOM General Synod in 2014. It contained an overview of issues confronting women both in society and within the church arena. Another important document was the new bill seeking the church's approval for child protection. These kinds of documents can provide a clear understanding of their respective historical setting, mission statements, decisions made regarding women's related issues in the past, and the strategic plans for the churches (see Marshall & Rossman, 1999).

Participants

I had three categories of participants in my research. The first category consisted of senior church leaders, the second were the leaders of the two women's organisations under study, and the third were the members of the women's groups. In the SSEC, I interviewed the Vice-Bishop and the National Coordinator of the SSEC Women's Fellowship at the national headquarters of the church in Honiara. I had interviews with four senior pastors of the three SSEC local churches on Small Malaita in which I did my fieldwork and 23 members of the Women's Fellowship in local SSEC churches of Likimaea, Roone, and Riverside. In the ACOM, I interviewed the Archbishop, Senior Bishop, and the Diocesan

Bishop of Malaita, the General Secretary and the Mission Secretary. I also interviewed the President of the Mothers' Union who lived in Honiara, and the Mothers' Union Secretary at the Diocesan Mothers' Union office in Auki, in the DOM. In Sa'a Parish I interviewed 21 members of the Mothers' Union.

The choice of three categories was based on the view that, although the focus of my thesis is the two church women's groups and their members, there are senior leaders within the SSEC and the ACOM who know much about the work of the church. Maurice Punch (1994:163) notes that in certain organisations, there are "gate-keepers" that researchers need to consult because of their inside knowledge of the organisations. Marshall and Rossman (1999: 113) similarly note that the "gate-keepers are important to interview because they are elites, the people who control the organisations and have full knowledge about the set-up and direction they are taking". Furthermore, these gate-keepers are the "designers and policy makers who can effect changes to the organisation" (Marshall and Rossman, 1999:113). The National Coordinator of SSEC Women's Fellowship, the President of the Mothers' Union, and the Secretary of the Diocese of Malaita, Mothers' Union were the gate-keepers of the respective women's organisations and were also involved in the policy and decision-making concerning the work of their organisations.

The local members of the two women's organisations were interviewed because of their daily experiences of social and church life in the village. They were also the implementers of church decisions at the village level who, in a way, felt the impact of church policies. Their contemporary experience could be a social indicator of church decisions on issues pertaining to women and society. All the participants were aged between 25 and 70 years. The age range is important because in Melanesia, and in Small Malaita, women often marry as young as 17 years and by the time they have reached 25 years they have already been participating in church community activities and have a lot of experience. Indeed, my research centred on married women who were members of the two women's organisations.

Prior to fieldwork, in addition to married women, I had identified elite participants, both men and women in the two churches. They were notified through official channels and telephone conversations and later appointments were made for interviews. For the ACOM participants, I had email correspondence with the General Secretary in late November

2014 when the initial approval of my research was granted by the University of Otago Human Ethics Committee. When I returned to Honiara in December 2014, I made verbal appointments with the participants in Honiara. Later in March 2015, I made additional appointments through conversations with other senior church officials, and a week later I began the interviews. For the Mothers' Union, I began arranging my interviews with them in February 2015.

I began making appointments with the SSEC senior church officials and pastors in June 2015. The Vice-Bishop and the National Coordinator of the SSEC Women's Fellowship were contacted by telephone and a few days later I interviewed them. On Small Malaita, at the end of June, I made contact, by mobile telephone, with the SSEC local pastors in charge of Likimaea, Roone, and Riverside. While I asked them to help invite women participants for interview, Leah, the National SSEC Women's Co-ordinator had already informed them of my arrival. When I arrived, I further discussed how the interviews would be conducted, especially with women leaders and local church pastors.

The communication link between church leaders and the local participants went well. It enabled my fieldwork to proceed smoothly. The success of obtaining permission for field research from the SSEC and the sense of cooperation in arranging and conducting the interviews with the SSEC and the ACOM participants benefited from the relationship of mutual respect between the two churches. The Vice-Bishop clearly conveyed to me that the SSEC authority endorsed any planned research conducted by Anglican Church leaders or any other mainstream church leaders in the SSEC, because they were members of Solomon Islands Christian Association (SICA) (Interview, Peter, 1 October 2015).

Language

The languages used in my fieldwork were Sa'a and Solomon Pijin. Small Malaita has three local languages, with Sa'a being the main language spoken by 90% of the island's population. 'Are'Are is spoken by people along the Maramasike passage, and Lau is spoken by immigrants from north Malaita, Walande and Fanalei (see Ivens, 1923). The villages of Likimaea, Roone and Riverside are Sa'a speaking and so the Sa'a language was used in my fieldwork. Solomon Pijin has been a lingua franca between speakers of the indigenous languages of Solomon Islands, originating in the overseas labour trade in the nineteenth century.

I used Sa'a language in every-day conversations with my local participants in Small Malaita. These included the personal interviews, focus group sessions, preaching, and my *Oohoung* with the people I met. It was interesting to note that in all the SSEC villages, although they did understand Sa'a languages well, there was always the tendency to mix in English words. For instance, the Christian key terms of 'God and Jesus' were referred to as '*Masta or Master*' and the terms 'holy spirit', 'salvation' and 'church' were never uttered in the local Sa'a language. My participants would say '*walana Masta*' (word of God), or words such as 'keep-up' or 'hands-up.' When I asked participants, whether they followed traditional practices, they would respond saying, they 'keep-up.' I realised that the terms used derived from a revival movement in SSEC in the 1970s where the SSEC followers, mainly Malaitans had renounced their allegiance to custom matters. I discovered these terms also applied to bride price rituals and funeral ceremonies. A new term "mothers-love," had recently emerged in the SSEC and replaced the local term *mwa'inio'la* (bride price). Another term that was often used among elderly woman in SSEC which related to activities of the Women's Fellowship is "*saen-saen*" (shine-shine) (Interview, Indrid, 7 September 2015; also interview, Crisolite, 21 July 2015). I found this was part of the Women's Fellowship pastoral activity of providing material support such as fetching water, carrying firewood, soap and local food to the older people, new mothers with babies, and disabled patients.

During my fieldwork among the SSEC communities, I discovered that the local villagers had created a new set of blended-English terms to express their faith and personal experience. I often asked the elderly people, including the local village pastor, to explain the meaning of the words and how they were being used. I realised that most of the terms were associated with the early SSEC Mission work since its birth in Queensland (Australia) in the late 1890s and the early 1900s.

The ACOM participants in Sa'a spoke using the Sa'a language during interviews and other informal conversations. On many occasions, young women used secular English terms such as 'interest' to express their feeling. Unlike the SSEC women, who used English Christian terms, ACOM women used more English secular words or expressions. However, there was another layer of original Sa'a language with figurative expressions used mostly by older women when describing their life experience and making comparisons between the modern Sa'a life context and life in the past. For instance,

Nester, one of the elderly members of the Sa'a Mothers' Union, used one of these figurative expressions when talking about her marriage, saying, "*oko lae, ta'a mwane melu hoda ki'i ana mwa'inio'la amu*" (you go but be careful or else we rub our hands on your bride price) (Interview, Nester, 18, February 2015). I later understood its meaning in terms of the cultural restrictions imposed on women in Small Malaita when they got married to protect the family from shame and indignity as a result of unfaithfulness in marriage on the part of the bride; this would lead her husband to divorce her and reclaim the bride price. This was one of the typical examples of the linguistic challenges in Sa'a language that I faced while in the field.

Solomon Islands Pijin was used for my 'elite interviewees'; the male and female leaders of SSEC and ACOM. It was easy for me to fully understand what was meant in the interviews and informal discussions. One of the elite participants of the ACOM requested that I conduct the interviews in English which I found beneficial because of the nature of questions which were conceptually designed in English, but he was constantly asking for repetition of the questions, so I later redirected the interviews in Pijin knowing it would be embarrassing for him to request this himself. All the interviews were recorded on my digital voice recorder. It took eight weeks to transcribe the interviews. My fluency in Sa'a language and Pijin gave me clarity in understanding the meaning of the key words used in the interviews and the general conversations.

Research Ethics

My research had to comply with the standards established and regulated by the University of Otago Human Ethics Committee (UOHEC). First, I submitted an application to the UOHEC and obtained an approval with the reference of 14/193 in November 2014 to begin initial MA research in early 2015. When my MA programme was upgraded to PhD level in July 2015, I did three months fieldwork under the same reference code in the SSEC in Solomon Islands. Prior to obtaining approval, a proposal was prepared with an information sheet, consent form and interview-guide questions which were written in English and translated into Pijin.

The proposal clearly stated the rights of participants in the conduct of the research with me as the researcher. This included obtaining the participant's consent to participate in the research, consent to have her/his photo or digital video clip taken and clear information

about their rights to allow their names and identity to be mentioned or concealed and protected in the thesis writing. After I conducted the MA research in February and March 2015, I had to revise the relevant standard forms to cater for the new PhD proposal which by now had included the Women's Fellowship of SSEC on Small Malaita.

To further consolidate the permission and confidence to do the research in these churches, I consulted the relevant church authorities and obtained formal letters of permission from the SSEC Vice-Bishop representing the SSEC authority and the General Secretary of the ACOM. As discussed, Punch (1994: 87-88) notes that researchers need to consult "gate-keepers" in organisations. During the fieldwork, I became rather critical of the standard academic procedures of written consent and reading information sheets about the research and its constraints on my women participants. The ethical documents did not serve to protect the rights of the local women participants. The ethics forms added another burden on the illiterate participants whom, on many occasions, were frightened of printed documents which were symbols of white people's power (see Smith, 1999). I met with some older women who were hesitant to hold the information sheet of papers which I gave them to read or even to sign their signatures. I feel that there is a need to review the ethical requirements to be compatible with Pacific cultures. As it stands, the process does not serve the purpose of protecting the participants, but frightens them and obstructs the research.

I gave my time helping women to understand what the papers meant. I met them as a group and spent time socialising, telling jokes and singing worship choruses in order to relieve them from the tension of the ethical formalities. I talked about the research and benefits to the community. My concern was not so much about them reading and signing their signatures on the university ethics papers but rather to give them some understanding of their rights and whether they were willing to participate. This was a cultural dilemma. Like other Oceania cultures, in Small Malaita there is always a tradition that people consent to the reception of whatever is presented to them, and to say otherwise is rude. However, I found that all my women participants consented to the use of their real names, photos, and video clips in the thesis or to be archived in the University of Otago digital archive. Some had even suggested I take a photo with me sitting with them as a pictorial memory of my visit. One elderly participant at Riverside, Indrid Houtalokeni, prepared herself in

traditional ornaments and requested that I be photographed with her. My research was enriched by such a level of mutual collaboration and trust.

For the elite participants, the ethical requirements fitted well with them as reading and writing is part of the office procedures. However, one of the senior ACOM officials requested that a pseudonym be used, not from fear for the church, but in case his responses were not appropriate to his position.

At the conclusion of my research, I wrote to the SSEC Reverend Bishop to formally thank him for permission to conduct the research at the SSEC headquarters in Honiara, and in SSEC villages on Small Malaita. The letter was copied to the leaders of the Women's Fellowship, the chiefs, and pastors of the communities in which I did my fieldwork. For the ACOM, I sent a formal email to the General Secretary for his administrative support. In the villages I formally thanked the women participants and offered *saediananga* (appreciation), symbols of thanks for them as is commonly appropriate in village context.



Figure 16: Ben Wate offering a token of saediananga (appreciation).

Receiving Ben Wate's token of *saediananga* (gratefulness or appreciation) by president of Likimaea SSEC Women's Fellowship on behalf of the group. Source: ©Ben Wate, July 2015.

Patton (2002) noted that local people have given much of their time to wait and prepare for their visiting researcher, so it makes sense to acknowledge their time and service and helps to widen the pathway for future collaboration and research to these local communities. Likewise, Marshall and Rossman (1999:90) add that “when they adjust their priorities and routines to help the researcher, or even just tolerate the researcher’s presence, they are giving themselves. The researcher is indebted and should be sensitive to this”.

Research Feedback

On conclusion of the field data analysis, I returned to Solomon Islands in January 2018, particularly to Small Malaita, to research two village communities, Sa’a Mothers’ Union (ACOM), and Roone Women’s Fellowship (SSEC) to get post-fieldwork research feedback. The visit was specifically to discuss my research findings with them after analysing the data I collected in the field.



Figure 17: Research feedback session

Members of the Mothers’ Union during the research feedback session at Sa’a. **Source:** ©Ben Wate, January 2018.

This was to ensure that the participants were aware of the data that will form a significant part of the thesis. Letters were sent directly to the village women's group leaders, and copied to their respective chiefs and church leaders.

Due to lack of resources and time, I could not manage to get research feedback with all local women participants in all the villages I visited in 2015. For the Mothers' Union, I hired a truck to transport the women to attend the research feedback session at Sa'a.



Figure 18: On the way for research feedback session

The local women's participants boarded a hired local village truck to attend the research feedback at Sa'a. **Source:** ©Ben Wate, January 2018.

The transport was arranged for women participants from Aulupeine because of the long distance they had to walk to reach Sa'a. The session was held at Sa'a primary school. I arranged for lunch and tea-breaks to be prepared during the half-day session. Marshall and Rossman (1999) speak of the researcher's indebtedness and sensitivity to the people when they adjust their priorities and give their time and themselves to the researcher. As they observe, "Reciprocity may entail giving time to help out, by providing informal feedback, making coffee...reciprocity should fit within the constraints of research and personal ethics

and within the constraints of maintaining one's roles as a researcher role" (Marshall & Rossman, 199:65).

At Roone, a transport was not needed as all the women resided in the village and most of them live in close proximity to the church building where the session was held. The local pastor had pre-arranged for the feedback session to be held in a nearby church building. Unlike the Sa'a Mothers' Union, instead of making food, the local SSEC women returned home after the session, and some of them who are close relatives brought food for me.

Data Analysis and Presentation

I did my data analysis through an intensive reading of the 53 interviews collected during my fieldwork. Two separate, bound copies of transcribed materials were produced which I set out in categories. A photo of each participant was pasted at the front page to each transcribed interview script to help me recall the body language of the participant in the context which the interview was conducted. This also evoked memories of the interviews.

Patton (2002) observes that no formula exists to transform qualitative data into findings. He notes, that the "challenge of qualitative analysis" lies in making sense of the massive amounts of data and what is required for the researcher to do his or her best to fairly represent the data and communicate what is revealed for the purpose of the study (Patton, 2002: 432-433). This involves the researcher's intelligence in understanding language and its meaning in context. While I follow Patton's observation, I am sensitive to Miles and Huberman (1994) who noted that in qualitative data analysis there are some ground rules for drawing conclusions and verifying the sturdiness of data. This may have raised the same concern as Patton, however the key word here is ground rules. This could mean a particular researcher's creative method that, when used by others, becomes a ground-rule rather than a theoretical approach.

I did not use qualitative digital software to discern the themes in my fieldwork data, but I followed traditional qualitative procedures to analyse my data. In reading through the interviews, I designed a table and arranged this into four rows. In the first row, all the participants were placed, in the second were the key words frequently used, the third row was for the description of the patterns that linked the key word, and the fourth row was set aside for general comments. Themes were identified from the key terms used, and also

formed a sense of feeling of what was said. A number of key local language terms were used by the participants, and I had to identify and select them to develop into themes that related them to the paradigm, the lens, through which I proposed to view the data, as set out in my research design.

My research is a comparative study of two church women's groups, the Women's Fellowship of the SSEC and the Mothers' Union of the ACOM, through case studies from which I examine how each church deals with the issues relevant to the roles and status of women. To do justice to the data, I shall present the emerging themes and findings in chapters five and six. In these two chapters I will present a selection of my interviews from each of the two principal field sites.

Conclusion

Mindfulness of the researcher's potential bias in conducting research and the final data analysis is a significant concern in this research. The chapter highlighted the threats to this concern and so discusses the researcher's positionality and the methodological approach of reflexivity. The chapter began with consideration of the research design, giving an outline of the paradigm that this thesis attempts to use. This thesis adopts an interpretative and positivist paradigm through the lens of transformative framework. The central aim of this research is to explore the intersection between local culture and Christianity, and the historical missionary, and colonial influences in the lives of women in Solomon Islands, and examines agencies and pathways for local women's development and empowerment. I took the local Christian context on Small Malaita and chose two active church women's groups, the Women's Fellowship of the South Sea Evangelical Church and the Mothers' Union of the Anglican Church of Melanesia as two case studies for comparison.

It was a complicated and a daunting task to address the issues of gender inequality in Solomon Islands, where there is a high commitment to cultural traditions and beliefs which clearly define gender roles and status. This thesis can only partly cover these issues. I suggest that my contribution to the process of empowerment of women survives the postmodernist feminist critique of subjectivity, bias and androcentricism, through my approach of 'empathetic neutrality'. My approach to the fieldwork and my participants was done with great sensitivity, mindful of the ethical standards of my academic status, the potential vulnerability of the indigenous participants, coupled with my sense of

indigeneity towards my local community. This thesis presents the 'silent voice' (cf. Eriksen, 2005) of Small Malaita women living in Christian communities.

Chapter 3: Women's Status in Solomon Islands

Introduction

Recent research conducted in Solomon Islands on the status of women has suggested quite a “messy”¹³, or mixed situation, between both positive and negative developments in women's lives (see Liki, 2010; McDougall, 2013). Gender relations and the status of women are paradoxical. While local culture or *kastom* influences gender inequality and women's discrimination and subordination in Solomon Islands society, it is evident that the changes that accompanied Christian missionsation and colonialism are responsible for revolutionising and redefining the notion of ‘work’, and consequently new, distinctive domestic spaces, privileging men in education and employment that in a way exacerbated patterns of indigenous male dominance. Nevertheless, in striving for empowerment, women have consistently invoked local culture and Christian frameworks as pathways for personal and collective development and emancipation.

Women are said to have power and status (Pollard, 2000; 2000b; Maezama, 2016) but they have not been able to experience equality in all places, areas and institutions including government institutions, church organisations, civil societies and rural communities. In Solomon Islands, development and empowerment programmes and initiatives have long been provided for women by responsible government ministries, international agencies and organisations such as the United Nations (UN) and the Department for Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) of Australia, NGOs and church based mission departments. Nevertheless, this structural process has not fully advanced a desired change in the lives of local women. This situation has prompted the emergence of women's groups in rural villages in Honiara and in other provincial centres, to act in unison with the Ministry of Women, Youth, Children and Family Affairs (MWYCFA) to address issues relating to the discrimination of women that restrict participation in decision making, political leadership, and economic development.

¹³ The term “messy” is adopted from Jacqueline Leckie's work. See, Jacqueline Leckie (2002). In B. Yeoh, P. Teo and S. Huang (Eds.). *Complexities of Women's Agency in Fiji, Gender Politics in the Asia-Pacific Region* (pp.156-80). London: Routledge

This chapter begins by introducing historical background information pertinent to understanding of the socio-cultural, economic, religious and political scape of Solomon Islands, a background in which the discussion of gender relations will be established. The chapter further discusses gender relations and the contemporary roles and status of women there, accounts for women’s engagement in various empowerment and development processes in dealing with the prevailing issues facing them, and the position they occupy in Solomon Islands society. This background information is relevant and significant for understanding the low status of women and the dilemma of gender relations, and women’s empowerment processes in the SSEC and the ACOM, in Solomon Islands.

Background to Solomon Islands

Solomon Islands consists of six large islands: Choiseul, New Georgia, Santa Isabel, Guadalcanal, Malaita, and Santa Cristobal-Makira. Besides these, there are hundreds of islands, medium and small, scattered across the archipelago, which stretches 1,360 kilometres from the Shortland in the north to Vanikoro in the south, some 1860 kilometres north east of Australia (Ernst, 1994; also see Moore, 2004).

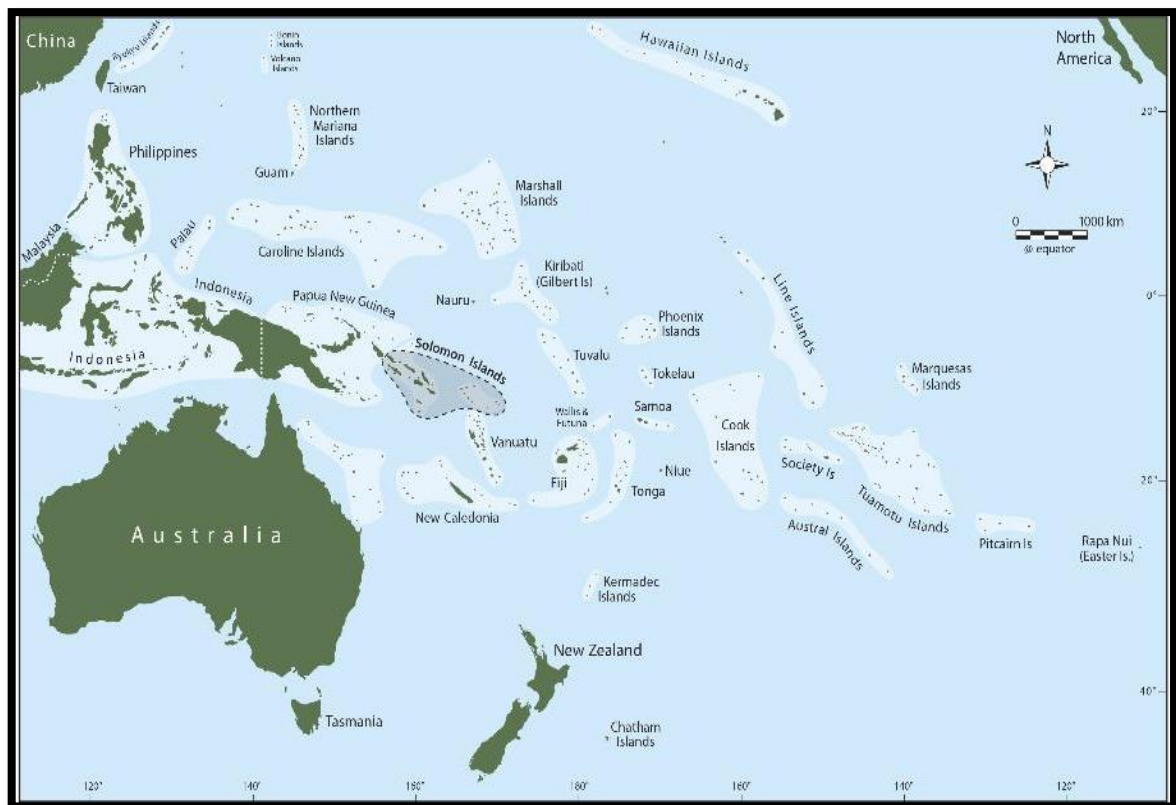


Figure 19: Map of the Pacific

Source: ©Les O’Neill, Department of Anthropology & Archaeology, 2018.

The first Europeans to visit the archipelago were Spanish explorers led by Alvaro de Mendana in 1568 (Fox, 1967: 7-11; Bennett, 1987:1), but it was settled by Melanesians for thousands of years before this (Spriggs, 1997; Thomas, 2009). The colonisation of the islands began in 1893 when the British government declared a Protectorate over the islands of Malaita, Ngela, Savo, San Cristobal (Makira) and New Georgia. In 1898, the islands in the eastern zone, Santa Cruz, the Reef Islands, Taumako, Utupua, Vanikoro, Tikopia and Anuta joined the Protectorate. The islands of Isabel, Luaniua (Ontong Java), the Shortlands and Choiseul, the northern Solomon Islands, were initially under German rule and were transferred to the British in 1900. The whole of the archipelago was then declared the British Solomon Islands Protectorate (BSIP) (Bennett, 1987: 103-106; Fox, 1967:50).

Governance

Solomon Islands is a nation of many islands. On 7 July 1978, Solomon Islands gained its independence from Britain and adopted the British Westminster system of government that provides for a representative democratic system through the House of Parliament, the country's supreme legislative body (Devisi, 1992; Kabutaulaka, 2001; Fraenkel, 2004; Moore, 2004). The current fifty parliamentary constituencies elect their Members of Parliament (MPs) every four years. The Prime Minister is the head of the government while Queen Elizabeth II is the head of the state represented by a local Governor General. Solomon Islands is a member of the Commonwealth.

There is also a provincial government system. Each of the nine provinces has a Provincial Assembly. It functions similarly to the House of Parliament. Provincial Assemblies are comprised of members who are elected from all the wards within the province. Members of the Provincial Assembly (MPA) are elected every four years. The executive provincial governments are headed by Premiers (Soaki, 2017:96-97).

Solomon Islands has only one city, Honiara. The city is managed by a Municipal Authority. Similarly, it functions like the Provincial Assembly, except that the executive government is headed by a Mayor.

Population

The 2011 statistics, the latest available, show that Solomon Islands has a national population of 515,870 (Solomon Islands *Statistic Bulletin* 06/2011:1). There are 251,415

females and 264,455 males, with an annual population growth of 2.3% (Solomon Islands *Statistic Bulletin* 06/2011:1), one of the highest in the world. The country has a total of 87 different languages (Moore, 2004:26). Common to all linguistic groups is Solomon Islands Pijin, the *lingua franca* that most people speak to communicate with people of other languages. About 80% of the population live in rural villages (Soaki, 2017: 96).

Religious Affiliation

Over 95% of the population of Solomon Islands are Christians, one of the highest percentages in the world. There are five mainstream churches: the ACOM (32%), the RCC (20%), the SSEC (17%), the SDA, (12%) and the United Church in Solomon Islands (UCSI) (10%). A number of new religious Christian revival groups and faith organisations are also present and account for less than 7% (Solomon Island National Census National Report, Volume 2, 2009:81). These new Christian sects include the Kingdom Harvest, the Living Word, the Global International Church (GIC), the Church of the Living God (COLG), the Assemblies of God (AOG), the Rhema Family Church (RFC), the Christian Outreach Centre (COC), and the Christian Revival Church (CRC). There are other religious faiths, such as the Baha'i Faith and the Jehovah Witnesses, and recently, an Islamic religious group has been formed to begin mobilising its faith (McDougall, 2009: 480-491). Certain groups of people are still practising ancestral religions, (1%).

Economic Status

Solomon Islands is rated internationally as one of the poorest countries in the world. The United Nations (UN) reports that Solomon Islands is one among the four countries in the world that suffer the greatest poverty and vulnerability if measured by Gross Domestic Product (GDP). The country's main exports are primary products including logs, fish, copra, palm oil, and cocoa (Central Bank of Solomon Islands, *Quarterly Review* for September 2017:6-8). Manufactured goods, equipment, and fuel as well as foodstuffs are imported from overseas, mainly from Australia, New Zealand, China, Malaysia and Singapore (Fraenkel, 2004:33). The country's annual national development and recurrent budget, including the health and education services, are supplemented by aid from overseas bilateral and multilateral partners.

However, while the modern cash economy struggles, in contrast to the more pessimistic accounts provided by organisations such as the UN, the economy and livelihood of the rural

village population is highly self-sufficient (*Solomon Star*, 7 March 2015). Over 80% of its population live in rural villages and a subsistence economy forms the basis of rural people's survival (Soaki, 2017: 96). Land is cultivated for root crops, vegetables and fruit, and marine resources such as sea food and fish provide the daily necessities of life.

Social Life and Local Political Organisation

Like other Melanesian countries, the contemporary Solomon Islands owes much to its precolonial social, political and cultural organisation. Despite increasing globalisation and the largely Western emphasis on individualism, Solomon Islands maintains local leadership and communal organisations including tribes and clans, villages and families. Each individual belongs within the hierarchy of this social and political setting.

Solomon Islands has various chiefly systems of leadership. On the island of Malaita, the focus of this study, men inherit chiefly authority over their clan members through the senior male line. There was a change to this traditional leadership system in the 1920s and 1930s when the British Colonial administration introduced the *headmen* to represent the central government (Burt, 1994; Moore, 2004; Akin, 2013). Following the anti-colonial *Maasina Rul* movement in the 1940s, paramount chiefs emerged as local community leaders (Nicolas, 1966; Keesing, 1978; Laracy, 1983; Bennett, 1987; Frazer, 1990; Lindstrom, 1997; White, 1997; Lindstrom & White & 1997). This system remains today where groups of chiefs work together, usually within specific cultural and linguistic areas (Moore, 2004). Today it has become a new powerful political structure that regulates norms and practices in rural communities, dealing with cultural issues, land matters and other socio-political and economic development issues in specific areas. Villages are common political units with their own structure. Although some houses are built outside villages, people still remain under the leadership of chiefs, and village committees govern the community in consultation with the chiefs.

Men as husbands and fathers mostly assume leadership over family units through securing their social and economic needs. In return, members of family units, including wives, are expected to submit to certain protocols affirming patriarchal leadership and authority. These include obtaining permission to use family property. It has always been a common cultural practice for a woman to inform her husband when she leaves the house to visit a

neighbour. Men do not follow similar cultural protocols, and have more freedom as family leaders.

Community life is governed by a system of kin-based gendered relationship. Women in particular are bound to certain rules and social expectations in the domestic and public arenas, but all people support each other through sharing food and offering physical labour for gardening and/or building houses. This mutual support is also manifested both in times of death and marriage, the latter a shared occasion of joyous feasting and celebration.

Traditional Religious Beliefs

Although Solomon Islands is a Christian country, its people retain pre-Christian religious beliefs. Like other Melanesians, many Solomon Islanders maintain strict religious affiliation with ancestral spirits and preserve powerful religious knowledge. People still believe in ancestral spirits and their power to control social and economic life. The belief is that everything that happens in life has a spiritual cause (Whiteman, 1983; Trompf, 1991).

Whiteman (1983:64) writes that “Melanesians, however, do not live in a compartmentalised world of secular or spiritual domains, but have an integrated worldview in which physical and spiritual realities are dovetailed”. Such a worldview leads to the belief that everything is nurtured by spiritual forces, and physical ailments, misfortune or success in life are indicators of the condition of one’s relationship with spirits of ancestors as well as with God.

The belief in ancestral spirits and spiritual powers is increasingly embedded within the social life of rural and urban communities. Children and young people grow into it. Although Christianity has been in Solomon Islands for almost two hundred years, this religious legacy continues to be evident in contemporary spiritual life. Certain Christian healers, including church pastors and priests, have been persuaded by these ideologies to engage in syncretised rituals of healing, where names of the ancestral spirits are invoked within the rituals of Christian practice (see Moore, 2004).

Although there is a general assumption among Melanesians that men were pre-ordained to access power and sacred knowledge, recent studies have shown that certain women were

also endowed to perform priestly rituals of purification for women. For example, Wate (2013, 234-235, also see Moore, 2017) noted an elderly woman from Small Malaita, who in her early days used to perform rituals of purification for women so that they could return to normal life after giving birth. This power is gendered. A woman's power is perceived as destructive of men's power. Following Codrington (1891, [2005]), the Austronesian term *mana* has often been used to describe this power, but this has been questioned by Keesing (1984) and Burt (1993) on the basis of their research in Malaita. For instance, the presence of women was restricted for fear that they would cause misfortune to fishing expeditions. In many rural villages one would rarely ever see men or even young adults passing under clothes-lines where women's clothes, especially when skirts and underwear are hanging. Women are not allowed to step over food items or kitchen utensils used to prepare food for men (Wate, 2013: 237). Women's skirts could even be used to exorcise spirits from people who were possessed.

Under the pre-Christian religion of Malaita, the spiritual power of ancestors controlling men had to be treated as *abu* or *tabu*, meaning that they must be respected as sacrosanct or holy (Keesing, 1982; Burt, 1994). The power of women to give birth could defile or pollute the ancestors, neutralising their power, removing their protection and provoking punishment of sickness, misfortune or death. Europeans, including missionaries, interpreted this as a negative power which degraded women but Keesing (1982) showed that the reality was more complex.

Kinship System

Throughout Solomon Islands people inherited land and organised its tenure and structuring social identity, through both male and female ancestors. On some islands such as Isabel, Guadalcanal and Makira, the female line was regarded as the most important and on others such as Choiseul and Malaita it was the male line. The descent systems have often been described as matrilineal and patrilineal, but as Keesing (1970) showed, they are actually cognatic. Thus, in Malaita, the male line is senior to the female line, meaning that people inherit their strongest identity and land rights from their father's clan, but they also belong to their mother's clan as junior members.

In Malaita, children inherit their father's properties. Properties include portions of land, reefs and coconut plantations. Properties are shared among sons, with an elder son usually

managing the properties for the family and taking over the role of his father. Daughters cannot actually 'own' specific property because they do not inherit the line of authority of ownership from their fathers. In practice, contemporary Malaitan women have reduced-ownership rights, referred to as secondary rights, while men inherit primary rights. Possessing secondary rights refers to women's ownership of land through her brothers' rights. For instance, if a sister wishes to clear a new area of land for gardening, a form of 'permission' will be granted for access to the land after the sister follows the cultural protocol of informing her brothers of her desire to cultivate the land. In this context, it does not mean she has no right, but the process of letting her brothers know is culturally constituted as honouring her brothers' collective rights as custodians of their father's land.

In rare circumstances, where only a female child is born, an arrangement could be made to give her a portion of land. In a situation where the male parent is the only person left in the clan, an adoption of one of the daughter's sons will be arranged to allow him to maintain the maternal clan. The child will then inherit the land and property of his grandfather, on behalf of his mother. In other circumstances, where a chief has only a daughter, or if he prefers his rights to be inherited by his daughter, he would arrange for *taho mwanenga*.¹⁴ A man of his choice would then be bought with shell valuables and brought into the chief's house for her. Her first-born son would assume his maternal grandfather's authority.

Gendered Division of Labour

The roles of men and women vary in different contexts, but women's roles are largely connected to the household and the domestic wellbeing of the family (Maeke, 1992: 148-149; Pollard, 2000: 4-6). In the pre-Christian period there was a basic division of tasks between men and women. Because of the increasing connection to the outside world, however, through education, international engagements and overseas employment opportunities, the roles of women are changing (Cox, 2017; Macintyre, 2017). Women can now pursue the professional careers that men used to occupy in the past, such as medical doctors, lawyers, pilots, university lecturers, public servants, and many others (Pollard, 2000: 6-11; Afia-Maela & Pollard, 2010). These professional careers are usually determined more by academic qualifications than by gender (see Liki, 2010; *Solomon Star* 13 April 2015). Another contribution to this shift is the influence of international ideas of

¹⁴ To adopt a young man from another tribe or village to assume chiefly leadership authority because the chiefly lineage has become extinct and there is no male to inherit the authority.

human rights. As women increasingly participate in women's organisations, they have access to basic knowledge of such rights, and on many occasions, challenge the tradition of inherited roles and positions in their own communities (Cox, 2017; Eves, 2017).

The division of responsibilities, based on gender, is highly visible in rural villages, compared to the urban centres. Women remain the economic managers of the domestic household (Pollard, 2003). They are engaged much more with the organisation of the tasks related to food production and subsistence gardening, and more often supervise the care of children and the general wellbeing of the family. Men do heavy manual work, but in most cases they are involved more in the external affairs of the family such as attending village committee meetings or sitting in to help resolve social disputes and other problems.

The Impact of Traditions, Colonialism, and Missionary Ideologies on Women

Women's contemporary roles and status in Solomon Islands reflect the influences of traditional beliefs, and colonial and missionary ideologies about women. The impact of this influx and integration has consequently resulted in the contemporary social situation prevalent in government, church institutions, civil organisations and local communities (cf. Jolly & Macintyre, 1989).

It is a common cultural view in Solomon Islands that when a female child is born, her birth is bragged about by family members as adding a 'helpful hand', and a 'monetary asset' to the family. Her birth is perceived as an extended hand to her mother in her continuing roles of providing household necessities, such as cooking and preparing meals, fetching water for family use, bathing junior siblings, doing laundry and maintaining domestic order in the family home (cf. Maezama, 2016).



Figure 20: Women preparing local food

As young women grow they learn their roles in the home. Here two women from A’ulupeine village are preparing local food, called *lauili* for the visiting guests. **Source:** ©Ben Wate, July 2015.

She is the “principal gardener” (Liligeto, 2006: 125) where farming and the general household economy are central responsibilities within her domain (Pollard, 2000). Young girls have to learn these skills because when they marry, they will be in charge of their own homes, and the domestic skills they learn from their mothers are considered very useful in their new households. A woman is also viewed as a moral agent in the family. Women are expected to have moral values that often constrain and reduce their freedom as people. They are expected to be obedient and respectful. In rural communities, families expect their daughters to obey their brothers, parents and clan leaders (Pollard, 2000). When speaking to village male elders, it is ensured that they will not raise their voices louder than the men they are communicating with. It is customary not to stand tall in front of elders but be seated and speak from a lower position. A woman could be considered disrespectful if she does not follow these ‘rules’ and socio-cultural expectations of gendered behaviour.

Bride price has been long discussed by outsider observers as a form of oppression. This is because of the nature in which the culture of bride price is ritually performed in marital relationships. It has the capacity for oppression and control of women within this context. When a young woman is married, the ritual of bride price provides cultural legitimacy for a marital relationship and at the same time, it regulates the passage of the bride under the authority of her prospective husband and tribe. In this context, the woman's rights and freedoms are being limited and controlled by her husband and her marital family.

In patrilineal societies where bride price¹⁵ culture is practised, a young woman is viewed as a valuable family monetary asset as well. In most cases, bride price (Conway & Mantovani, 1990; Pollard, 2000; Wate, 2004; Zorn, 2010) is set to be paid to her family when she marries; hence there are significant connections between marriage, gender and money. The bride price ceremony publicly shows that a marital relationship has been established between a couple (Conway & Mantovani, 1990:79; Wate, 2004). It symbolises and legitimates the entry of a bride into her groom's family and seeks to identify her as a married woman under her husband's authority. The bride price also legitimates the handing over of parental responsibility to the husband, and in due course, the bride is expected to treat her husband as a father, who holds authority over her and provides her social needs. Thus she will always consult and seek his permission for whenever she leaves the house to attend to any other activities within her common household roles and responsibilities. In this case, bride price limits women's agency, by forming part of a wider cultural system which would negate leadership and status roles in other social institutions such as the church and other women's groups.

In matrilineal societies, bride price is not practised. This is because, a bride would not leave her maternal home as she, along with her sisters would inherit their maternal rights of property ownership (see Bogese, 1948; Naramana, 1987; Maezama, 2016).¹⁶ By contrast, in patrilineal societies, the prospective wife leaves her family and clan to be with her

¹⁵ Bride price is a cultural practice which involves the exchange of customary valuables during the ceremony of marriage whereby a bride's family is presented with valuables from the groom's side. In early times, only shell valuables such as *tafulia'e* (used in northern part of Malaita) *ha'a* (used in South Malaita including 'Are'Are, Ulawa, and Makira) and other precious ornaments were regulated as acceptable mediums of exchange. In contemporary times, bride price is settled mainly with cash (see Zorn, 2010: 103) and manufactured products.

¹⁶ These studies focus on the matrilineal culture of Santa Ysabel where women inherit ownership rights over household and tribal land. In this case, prospective husbands have to leave their tribes and clans to live with their wife's family at the time of marriage.

husband's family. However, in a new social and economic environment, the culture of bride price has begun to change, accommodating modified cultural rituals, and new forms of exchange commodities such as cash and Western manufactured goods (Conway & Mantovani, 1990; Solomon Islands NGO *Shadow Report*, 2002-2012:17; Zorn, 2010: 103). At the same time bride price began to increase in prominence, and is now evident in matrilineal societies. Similar bride price ceremonies are performed as in the case of patrilineal societies, and brides have to leave natal homes to join their husband's family. Despite some resistance to the culture of bride price, however, the culture has continued to be practised both in rural villages and urban centres (Conway & Mantovani, 1990).

Although bride price culture is valued, mainstream churches and new religious revival groups have different views and approaches to it. For instance, the SSEC and other religious revival groups which are opposed to the preservation of local cultures have not encouraged it. While the SSEC opposes bride price in theory, it modifies it in practice, thereby compromising the internal culturally mixed feelings about it (Pollard, 2000). The SDA and UCSI partially engage in bride price and do not actively oppose it. The ACOM, and the RCC tolerate bride price. This accommodating approach to local cultures and customs is historically constituted (see Hilliard, 1978; Jolly, 1989; Langmore, 1989).

The colonial and missionary perspective of women's roles and status reinforced local cultural views of women. Historically, the British colonial regime was a male dominated patriarchal governing system. Its collaboration with missionary agencies, which were also male dominated, reinforced and reinscribed the division of gendered roles and changed them in ways that were compatible with Christianity and the construction of a state. Colonial government educational institutions, missionary schools, and the gendered syllabuses were venues through which colonial and missionary ideologies were introduced (Foreman, 1984; Tiffany, 1984). In the late 1960s and early 1970s, colonial government offices began employing local women, but mostly offered them manual or clerical roles such as office cleaners, typists, and secretaries.¹⁷ Men assumed administrative and leadership roles that mostly involved decision-making (see Afia-Maetala & Pollard, 2010). In churches, local women provided domestic skills of home management, cooking,

¹⁷ Although secretaries can wield tremendous informal *de facto* power within organisations and can act as 'gate keepers' for those who are formally involved in decision-making, particularly over time.

childcare, and personal hygiene (cf. Jolly & Macintyre, 1989; Pollard, 2000; 2003; Douglas, 2003; Choi & Jolly, 2014; Soaki, 2017). These skills could be selectively invoked as forms of self-help, empowerment and development, while also providing solidarity and community for women, through the institutional frameworks of the churches in Solomon Islands. However, men were involved in church governance, while women played supportive roles. These influences have structurally defined women's roles and status in all sectors of communities in Solomon Islands, as well as churches.

Women's employment and the new opportunities that jobs have provided have increasingly conflicted with gendered expectations in marriage, partly as a result of the commodification of bride price. This is because bride price is viewed locally as a customary symbol that legitimises the husband's and relatives' power over wives, and in areas where paid employment is available, control access to jobs. In most situations wives are expected to stay home and follow family and community decisions. This can be extended into areas of community and church volunteering and unpaid work. Both have been facilitated by education.

Education

Records show that women's education began in Solomon Islands as early as 1906 and was introduced by missionaries (Afia-Maetala & Pollard, 2010:9-14). The missionary control continued until the 1940s and 1950s when the colonial government took over and formalised the education system. Although there has been formal education in Solomon Islands since 1950s it was not until the 1960s that a significant number of women began secondary and tertiary education locally and overseas.

Formal¹⁸ education is a male domain. While many girls attended primary schools, only a small number of girls, compared to boys, graduate to junior (Years 7-9) and senior (Years 10-13) schools. This also applies to opportunities for tertiary education. Girls' education has suffered from the predominant local cultural beliefs about women's roles and

¹⁸ Formal education refers to the Western model of education system which was introduced in the early 1900s. At that time, education was under the control of missionary organisations. Church organisations took over from missionaries and continued providing education until around the 1960s after which period the British colonial government began regulating the education system. However, even now churches have continued to run schools alongside the government. In essence, for the church, education is a form of service while the government continues to regulate it as a system.

expectations (Sade, 1992; Pollard, 2000; also see Kari, 2010). It is a common belief that girls were meant to be married and stay at home because their roles were basically to manage the household, and spend time in childcare (see Dureau, 1993).

According to Solomon Islands NGO *Shadow Report on the Status of Women in Solomon Islands (2002-2012: 22)*, girls' education faces stereotypes based on indigenous gendered roles. The report stated that while there is a higher number of girls enrolled in primary schools, the number dropped when it came to the transition to higher levels of education. The report highlights a number of factors that have contributed to this scenario. Firstly, parents put more pressure on females to help at home. Secondly, parents do not value the education of girls. Thirdly, education is not free in Solomon Islands. It is expensive for parents to meet the costs of educating their children. Fourthly, related to the expenses of funding children's education, the preference is for boys to attend school, while girls stay home.



Figure 21: Girls are expected to stay at home to help their mothers.

As girls grow, they begin learning about their roles as future mothers. Girls at *Kalona* village, Small Malaita, having time out playing at the same time as caring for their siblings. **Source:** ©Ben Wate, July 2015.

There is a general assumption that when boys finish school, they are able to find paid employment (Pollard, 2000). Girls' education is also disadvantaged in circumstances when they become pregnant, are expelled, and prevented from completing secondary education. This scenario has often limited the economic and educational potential of young women. Girls who are expelled from schools because they are pregnant are often stigmatised due to pressure from relatives and communities. In some instances, the effect of stigmatisation on them can lead to instances whereby they enter prostitution in order to support their child, if their parents and relations cannot afford to provide the necessary support.

Generally, while girls go to school, their education is not a priority for parents because they are thought to be less intelligent than boys (Pollard, 2000). Many parents believe that girls are too weak to make decisions. Some even think that "girls are more ambitious to get married earlier than boys" (Kii, 2009:151). In many cases, it is a common belief that a girl's

place is at home, and until they are married her main role is to care for aging parents (Pollard, 2000:6; see also, Maeke, 1992). Based on these beliefs, boys are given priority over girls in education, especially when school fees and other financial contributions that each family has to pay for secondary and tertiary education are expensive. With financial difficulties and other pressures, parents tend to prioritise their son's education, while discontinuing their daughter's formal education (Solomon Islands NGO *Shadow report*, 2002-2012).

At the national level, education for women has not given girls equal opportunities with boys in primary, secondary and tertiary education. A Performance Assessment Report of 2015-2016 (PAR) of the Ministry of Education has shown this gender disparity in education.

Table 1: Total Enrolment by Education Level, School Type and Gender, 2015-2016

		2015			2016		
Education Level	School Type	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Early Childhood	Kindergarten	12,419	12,838	26,257	14,092	13,489	27,581
Primary	Primary school	38,672	35,915	74,587	37,431	34,971	72,402
	C. High School	28,229	26,170	54,399	31,234	28,766	60,000
	Primary Total	66,901	62,085	128,986	68,665	63,737	132,402
Junior Secondary	CH School	13,969	13,370	27,339	14,536	13,925	28,461
	PS School	1,409	1,241	2,650	1,446	1,243	2,689
	NS School	1,158	1,170	2,328	1,166	1,58	2,324
	Junior Secondary Total	16,536	15,781	32,317	17,148	16,326	33,474
Senior Secondary	CH School	5,605	4,780	10,385	6,086	5,494	11,580
	PS School	2,291	1,947	4,238	2,353	1,809	4,162
	NS School	1,581	1,431	3,012	1,435	1,380	2,815
	Senior Secondary Total	9,477	8,158	17,635	9,874	8,683	18,557
Grand Total		106,333	98,862	205,195	109,779	102,235	212,014

Source: Ministry of Education & Human Resources, Solomon Islands website: <http://www.mehrd.gov.sb>. Accessed on 18 April 2018. © Crown copyright.

Key:

CH Community High School

PS Provincial Secondary School

NS National Secondary School

This unequal enrolment of girls contrasted with the 2009 national population census, which recorded a very close margin between gender categories. If priority had been given for equal opportunities, there should have been a closer margin of enrolment between boys and girls in both primary and secondary schools.

The pattern of gender inequality in education becomes more apparent in government sponsored overseas scholarships. From 2005 to 2009, 513 scholarships were awarded to female students, amounting to 33% of the total, and 1,129 to male students, which was 63%

of the national scholarship award (Pollard & Waring, 2010: 8). This trend was reflected in the Ministry of Public Service Master Civil List for 2009. From 1980 to 1989 only two women obtained a university qualification at bachelor's degree level. From 1980 to 2008, 177 women graduated with a bachelor's degree. From 2000 to 2008, the first six women graduated with master's degrees, and one woman, for the first time, graduated with a doctoral qualification (Liki, 2010:9). Despite the constraining factors, those young women who have managed to transcend them have been able to attain higher educational qualifications and secure paid employment in government public service or the private sector (Waring & Pollard, 2010; also cf. Macintyre & Spark, 2017).

This study gives attention to gender equality in formal education, because education has an impact on women's lives and to a certain extent pre-conditions the roles they play both inside and outside the local church communities. Education contributes significantly to women's leadership roles, and management of their organisations in local church communities. Women can be involved in leadership roles and decision making if they are educated.

Women and Socio-economic life: Employment, Unemployment and Poverty.

Women are life-givers for families. In most cases, women spend their lives clearing and weeding gardens, planting and harvesting food crops. The engagement of women in household duties is enormous. It is a routine obligation for women to ensure that family needs and necessities are available. For instance, food and water must be available each day, the family home must be tidy, and clothes washed and kept clean for use (cf. Spark & Meki, 2013). In most cases, young children rely on their mothers to prepare them for school and usually walk them to school each day, before attending to household duties and tasks. Even though this occupies much of the adult women's work, the requirement for incomes to fund expenses such as education, and for urban families, food and housing, raises questions about employment, unemployment and underemployment, and their gendered aspects. Poverty and unemployment are complex social issues in Solomon Islands. Local women do have the advantage of access to ready supplies of crops and marine resources and they produce their own food.

There is a high rate of unemployed wives and women who live in urban centres such as Honiara, however, face harsh realities in social life. In most cases, working husbands control their own earnings and that has made it quite difficult to rely on men to cater for all the family's needs. In 2007, only 33.4% married women received cash income (Solomon Islands NGO *Shadow Report*, 2002-2017: 24). As managers of the family, otherwise unemployed wives living in urban centres find it difficult to cope with the cost of living. Basic food in stores such as rice, sugar, biscuits and other manufactured goods have become unaffordable as the retail prices of goods in shops are increasingly high. The small income that families earn is used for electricity bills, clothes and other domestic needs. Most significantly, a considerable amount of money is spent on children's education and related costs. Adding to family spending, is the *Wantok*¹⁹ culture (Moore, 2004: 27), in which certain distant relatives or friends have the freedom to lodge with a family for as long as they want. With an already constrained budget, this situation is even more critical where food and other essential needs have to be distributed equally between members of the family.

Along the streets of Honiara, the capital city of Solomon Islands, and provincial towns and suburbs, one would hardly miss seeing the small food markets, built along the roadside with betel nut, lime and leaf being sold from stalls.²⁰

¹⁹ *Wantok* refers literally to 'one talk' (see Moore, 2004: 27), one people of the same cultural linguistic area. However, the word is broadly applied to mean any forms of valued relationship outside the nuclear family. It could mean close friends. The *wantok* culture is an inclusive form of sociality that can be extended, depending on time and circumstances.

²⁰ Betel nut chewing is popular in Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands, and is gradually extending to Vanuatu. It is also consumed in parts of South East Asia, for example, the Philippines. When one chews the betel nut and lime, together with *korokua*, there is an instant feeling of euphoria. The selling price during non-harvesting seasons, especially in December to February is SBD\$10 (USD\$1.30) per chew or SBD\$8 for a nut, SBD\$2 a leaf, and SBD\$1 for the use of coral lime powder.



Figure 22: Along the Streets of Honiara

Women selling betel nut, lime and *korokua* fruits (from a planted type of edible leaves), and single cigarettes made from tobacco sticks. **Source:** ©Ben Wate, February 2018.

These micro ventures of small income-generating activities are not an easy undertaking for women, who must stand there under the heat of the sun and the cold at night, but there is no alternative as huge family needs and children's school education must be funded (*Solomon Star*, 8 March 2009).

It is evident that women and housewives at all levels face the most severe social and economic pressures in Solomon Islands. Women are expected to feed the family and also provide for the needs of other visiting relatives and friends. Under adverse and poor economic conditions, women have always been put under strain to meet the challenges of household duties.

The disproportionate rate of girls in formal education has contributed to lower employment rate for women (Solomon Islands, *NGO Shadow Report 2002-2012*: 24). While there is a close margin in terms of male and female population, only 26,658 or 15.8% of women are in formal employment, while 54,536 or 31.4% of men have formal employment (Solomon Islands National Statistical *Bulletin*, 2011: 1-2). While it is difficult to ascertain the precise factors leading to this, one of the predicaments preventing married women from working

has often been the social expectations of parents and husbands for mothers to look after children. This often occurs early when couples have started having children (Sigimanu, 2010). Also, in some extreme circumstances, some men simply do not allow their wives to be in paid employment. There is a long-standing fear that wives in Solomon Islands are likely to be seduced by their male colleagues.

Another factor impeding women is that some parents have concerns about the safety of their daughters, and always restrict them from seeking employment and living alone in urban centres. They have no confidence in girls having the capacity to resist men who may seduce them (see Kii, 1999). This means that often only men are allowed to seek employment in towns and urban centres because they are strong and can protect themselves. This trend gives rise to a number of young women who leave school at Forms 6 (Year 12) and 7 (Year 13), only to live and work as house-girls for relatives working in urban places (for comprehensive research in Vanuatu, see Rodman, Kramer, Bolton, & Tarisese, 2007). Such casual work does not always require wages but enables the young women to be supported with the purchase of basic household needs such as clothes, bedding and kitchenware which are mostly needed to begin a family home. This is to avoid embarrassment for herself, her immediate family and the clan. Girls leaving high school and going to accompany working relatives as 'house-girls' is a common practice in rural villages among many families today.²¹ Other reasons for women's unemployment are personal and vary from one family to another, but it is commonly attributed to gender-based social and cultural expectations.

Solomon Islands has provided for paid maternity leave of 25% of the salary for 12 weeks after childbirth for female employees. The Public Service General Orders (PSGO) alternatively offer a 100% paid maternity leave for public servants excluding probationers (Solomon Islands NGO *Shadow Report*, 2002-2012:24; Solomon Islands CEDAW Combined Initial, *Second & Third Periodic Report*, 2012:47-48). The variation, therefore, provides for private organisations, NGOs and churches to make their own maternity leave policies. Some private sector and non-government organizations, including churches, are

²¹ These are from my observations in villages. This is an ethical problem. While a number of parents have concern for their daughters' safety in urban centres, they usually arrange to have their daughters accompany their working relatives to urban centres and towns to work as house-girls. For those who have opportunities for paid employment, they can work but, in many cases, close relatives always monitor their personal safety.

restricting women under the ‘half-pay maternity policy’ in their general guidelines for employees. For instance, the ACOM stipulates that a woman employee on maternity leave will have her salary reduced to 50% during a period of six weeks before childbirth, and six weeks after childbirth (General Guideline of Service for Lay Employee, 2014: 7-8). Most private sector employers pay female employees on maternity leave 25% of a fortnight’s salary for a period of twelve weeks.

Women and leadership

Local culture presents many difficulties for women in leadership. Although some research (see Liligeto, 2006; Pollard, 2006; McDougall, 2014; Maezama, 2016) has shown that women still hold important traditional leadership positions as female-chiefs in specific communities where senior inheritance is in the female line, men remain in dominant positions of leadership at all levels of society (McDougall, 2015), especially in Malaita.

This is particularly evident at the national level in the election of Members of Parliament, which reveals people vote for male leaders (Wood, 2015). There are mixed perspectives on this. While many people attribute this to local culture that discourages the advancement of women in leadership, some elite women believe that failure to improve their position is the fault of the women themselves (*Solomon Star*, 9 April 2015). For instance, Pollard (2003), in her research on women’s organisations in Solomon Islands, pointed out that jealousy and personal grievances between women lead to the failure of personal goals and collective social and economic development. This point was further articulated by another local educated woman, Afulia Billy. She argues that just because women are educated it does not mean that they have better qualities in leadership than men, are immune from corruption or have better knowledge of national politics and development. Women share both the strengths and weakness of men (Billy, 2012).

However, the general view of Solomon Islanders is that women should not give up talking about leadership.²² Women should be pushing forward to be recognised rather than succumbing to and internalising the belief that they are incompetent and should be confined to family welfare and household activities (Liki, 2010). But the struggle to push for leadership has been compromised more by the public view that the right time has not yet

²² This opinion is widely shared among local women I came across during workshops and informal conversations.

come and women have to wait for this right time for leadership (*Solomon Star*, 23 March 2014).

Women and Violence

Women and girls continue to face violence in urban and rural households as well as externally (cf. Zimmer-Tamakoshi, 2012: 73-105). Violence against women and girls appears in different forms, from physical to emotional abuse. According to a report on gender-based violence in Solomon Islands presented to the World Conference on Social Determinants of Health (WCSDH) in Brazil in 2011, violence against women in Solomon Islands is prevalent (Rasanathan & Bhushan, 2011). According to a Family Health and Safety Study released in 2009, “64% of women, age ranged from 15 to 49 who have an intimate relationship have experienced physical or sexual violence by an intimate partner” (See Solomon Islands Country Report, 2009: 3; also, Stocktake of the Gender Mainstream Capacity of Pacific Islands Governments-Solomon Islands, 2012: 8). Violence against women is often premised on social insecurity, the complexity of local gender relations, and notions of *kastom* (Zimmer-Tamakoshi, 2012: 73). It is a significant consequence of gender inequality. The “violence that women face, ranges from sexual violence, coercion, emotional or physical violence ... [which is] inflicted by intimates and non-partners” (Rasanathan & Bhushan 2011: 1). As noted by Pauline Soaki (2017), physical violence against women, particularly wives and female relatives has always been explained in the context of discipline to retain the moral status of husbands and male relatives (see Solomon Islands Country Report, 2009: 11). Most elders, including some women, believe wife-beating is culturally justified for disloyal or disobedient wives. It is viewed as a form of discipline for breaking social norms and not living up to social expectations of women’s roles (see Macintyre, 2012; Soaki, 2017).

Domestic violence occurs in various forms at different levels of Solomon Islands society, including the churches. For example, in a report presented to the 14th General Synod of the ACOM in November 2014, the Provincial Mothers’ Union President warned the church of the rapid increase of violence against women at home and in public premises, and the church’s inability to deal with it (ACOM General Synod, *Minutes*, 2014). A similar critique was also highlighted by the ACOM’s Archbishop, David Vunagi, in his ‘Charge’²³ to the

²³ Traditionally, the Bishop’s address to a Synod is called the Bishop’s Charge.

General Synod. Archbishop Vunagi pointed out that the church and society must be informed that sexual violence of women such as rape, harassment, assault, and defilement in Solomon Islands is critical, and accounts for 55% of violence-related crimes, the highest recorded rates internationally. He criticised the church leaders for ignoring the call to act and protect vulnerable people from such evil acts (ACOM General Synod Archbishop's Charge, 2014).

Despite the many reports on issues of violence against women which have flooded the local media,²⁴ the national government has not taken serious steps to legislate against these household-based atrocities. An Act on Family Protection, although passed in Parliament in 2014, has not been fully enacted (*Solomon Star*, 31 March 2015). Members of the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force (RSIPF) do not always move to arrest or prosecute offenders. It seems that the local officers compromise their policing responsibilities due to local cultural beliefs and biases about women. The belief that men and husbands have customary rights to hit women relatives or wives as a form of discipline is widely prevalent in Melanesia (NGO Shadow Report on Status of Women in Solomon Islands, 2002-2012; Soaki, 2017). Notions of *kastom* have been invoked to justify these notions. It has been “employed to police women’s behaviour and conduct of men towards women” (Cox, 2017:81; see also, Soaki 2017). In Solomon Islands, it is generally believed that men have the duty to discipline wives or female relatives. Generally, the judicial system is reluctant to act consistently to enforce harsher penalties against those who have committed violence against the vulnerable, such as women and children. Local judges and magistrates have been lenient in sentencing offenders in domestic violence cases (see *Solomon Star*, 2 September 2014; Solomon Islands NGO, 2002-2012:8-10).

Women and Health

Some of the major health issues that women face, relate to domestic violence. A recent nationwide research study on family health and safety in Solomon Islands has found that “there is a clear association between partner violence and symptoms of physical and mental ill-health” (Solomon Islands Family Health and Safety *Study Report*, 2013: 6). Of the 1,663 women interviewed, 501 or 30.1% reported experiencing poor or very poor health as a consequence of domestic violence. These poor health experiences include problems with

²⁴ The *Solomon Star*, *The Island Sun* and Solomon Islands Broadcasting Cooperation (SIBC).

walking (7.4%), difficulties in doing normal activities (9.3%), experiencing recent pains (14.7%), problems with memory (8.7%), dizziness (55.8%), and vaginal discharge (7.5%) (Solomon Islands Family Health and Safety *Study Report*, 2013: 6-7).

Women living in urban and rural areas face some similar and very different challenges. For example, there are inequities in women's access to ante-natal clinics between rural and urban areas. This problem is an obvious one in rural villages. About 84% of cases of childbirth were attended by a non-skilled provider, compared to 95% in urban centres which received better assistance (SI-CEDAW- CI- STP *Report*, 2012: 64; see also, Dureau, 1993; Ram & Jolly, 1998). A number of factors could contribute to this. In most rural communities, clinics and rural health centres are quite far away from where people live and could take an entire day to reach. This has always been a difficulty faced by pregnant women and the elderly. Women are constantly busy in laborious gardening work and attending to household and domestic affairs, so that in many circumstances they compromise and risk their health. This does not mean that all female health issues are related to physical violence, but common behaviours of men towards women have indeed undermined women's health and safety.

Gender Relationships

While Solomon Islands is a signatory to the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the state of gender relations and discrimination against women in socio-economic and political life continues to pose challenges for Solomon Islands society (Macintyre, 2017; SI-CEDAW- CI- STP *Report* 2002-2012). In most cases, women are secondary to men in the social hierarchy of the community and they take a subordinate position in the social order. This can be found in rural villages, and even in urban centres. Although there is a growing sense of women's roles alongside those of the men, there are invariably circumstances where discrimination of roles along gender categories is found throughout Solomon Islands. Women are discriminated against simply because of the cultural belief that their roles are firmly confined to the household, and not open to the public (for further discussions of the public/private dichotomies, see chapter 5). In churches, women continue to face discrimination when it comes to formal leadership positions and decision-making. Women are mostly encouraged to taken on leadership responsibilities relating to family and domestic affairs. For instance, since the 1970s, the SSEC and the ACOM have had qualified

trained women who could become leaders within the formal leadership hierarchy of the church; however, they were assigned to take teaching roles in church schools or work with the church women's groups such as the Women's Fellowship or the Mothers' Union. The pattern of segregation of women continues in the church.

Women and Political Leadership

The participation of women in political leadership is limited and is generally not accepted (Liki, 2010; McMurray 2012; Wood, 2015). Since the independence of Solomon Islands in 1978, only three women have been elected as Members of Parliament (MPs) in the 40 years to 2018. Hilda Kari was elected in 1989 and later re-elected in 1994, serving until 1997. The second woman, Vika Lusibaea, was elected in 2012 to replace her husband who was imprisoned for his involvement in the militia activities of Malaita Eagle Force (MEF) against Guadalcanal Liberation Front (GLF), during the ethnic conflict in Solomon Islands from 1998-2003 (Fraenkel, 2004), and the third was Freda Tuki, elected in 2014 and currently serving her first term (Soaki, 2017: 97). In 2014, a total of 49 women contested parliamentary elections, but only one woman successfully won a seat. In 2006, a lot of educational awareness talks were facilitated by external Pacific and NGO bodies. During that time 26 women and 427 men contested the election but none of the women were successful (Allen, 2008:42; Wood, 2015, Soaki, 2017). Given the discouraging results from local women's attempts to gain support and achieve a positive result in recent national general elections, in 2010, only 22 women contested the national election.

The trend is different in provincial politics. Since the establishment of the provincial government system in the early 1980s, a number of women have been elected to be Members of Provincial Assemblies (MPAs). Five provinces have female MPAs: Western Province, Choiseul, Ysabel, Temotu and Malaita. In 2009, six women were elected to Provincial Assemblies. In 2014, the number was reduced to four MPAs (*Solomon Star*, 11 March 2018). In a similar pattern to national parliament, only one woman was usually elected to a provincial assembly at any one time throughout the country. The Western Provincial Assembly was the only province that saw an election of two female MPAs. Malaita province elected its second female MPA in 2014.

While there is a difference concerning the number of successful women voted into parliament compared to provincial assemblies, the pattern of voting is similar. Women

campaigning for political leadership both at national and provincial government levels have not been fully supported by local communities (Morgan, 2005). Most male candidates were financially well supported. The main factor undermining women's electoral success was premised on indigenous cultural gender relations and beliefs (Fraenkel, 2004; Moore, 2004; Allen, 2008; Dinnen & Firth, 2008; Wood, 2015; Cox, 2017). Some scholars (Pollard, 2000; Soaki, 2017) have suggested that factors influencing non-support for women's political leadership ambitions have been the result of cultural, colonial and missionary influences and legacies (Cox, 2017; Wood, 2015). The indigenous notion of *kastom* has also been used in various ways for different purposes in Melanesia (see Rawlings 2015 for a recent overview). In Vanuatu, *kastom* was invoked as a vehicle – both symbolic and pragmatic – to establish a strong sense of identity that could be used to establish a distinctive form of citizenship that connected people, land, place and state (Rawlings, 2015). *Kastom* has been theorized as knowledge and the way of life which has been used to legitimise male leadership for public office, while positioning women within domestic spheres (Keesing, 1992; Burt, 1994; Fraenkel, 2004; Jolly, 1994; Moore, 2004). However, Bolton (2007; 2003) has suggested that perspectives on *kastom* have involved active female agency with gendered practices and notions of culture being reclaimed by women despite their origins in masculinised notions of Melanesia nationalism.

By contrast women are confined to the domestic arena. Colonial administration had much influence on the roles women performed, especially in the public service. Women were employed mostly to assume duties such as orderlies, cleaners, typists, stenographers and secretaries (Soaki, 2007: 99; Afia-Maetala & Pollard, 2010). In a way, while these roles were considered as less important in the administrative structure and functions of public service, they were useful in providing opportunities for paid employment for women, and also supporting the administrative needs of women's groups.

The Expanding roles of Women

Education and church teachings have had increasing impact on the roles women perform and the spaces they occupy in Solomon Islands. However, while women have not been able to equally access formal education like men, most educated women have confidence in themselves and could perform the roles that are usually reserved for men. An increasing number of educated women are being appointed to take up leadership roles alongside men in villages. For example, in some villages on Small Malaita, women are members of village

committees which manage the social welfare needs of their communities.²⁵ In some church organisations, a number of young women (most of whom have finished schooling at primary and junior secondary schools) have been given leadership roles in village-based organisations. In the ACOM, women were elected to take up administrative positions in some parishes, such as secretary and treasurer. These have enabled them to share common roles and occupy spaces that men once solely performed and occupied in the past.

A similar trend can be found in urban places. Despite the gender disparity in women's leadership, women have gradually assumed managerial positions in government public services, academic institutions, the private sector and NGOs. A number of women have been promoted to positions as Permanent Secretaries or Chief Executive Officers (CEO) and Directors (Liki, 2010; cf. Morgan, 2005:11). In the private sector, a few women have been appointed as general managers of companies. In the ACOM, a woman has been promoted to the position of Management Accountant at the Church's national headquarters in Honiara. The position had not been held by a woman in the past.

While educated women living in urban centres are increasingly assuming higher public roles in Government, in NGOs and in the private sector, in rural communities local women have not been able to take major leadership roles. However, while in certain villages a few women were members of village committees, there is a tendency for women not participating in committee discussions to normally accept what has been decided on by men. Instead, they have played supportive roles in their local communities including the churches. Local women take active roles mostly in their own women's organisations and groups.

Although there have been some significant changes in the roles that women perform and the spaces that women occupy in the last decades, the inherent structural position of women is marked by inequality and this is evident in the treatment that women experience in the organisations they work in, and in public ceremonies which involve them. For instance, where a female senior public servant is invited to a ceremony as a guest of honour, which is also attended by male senior government officers or church leaders, there is invariably a

²⁵ In Sa'a village, a former school teacher, who is also the wife of one of the high chiefs of Sa'a, is a member of the village committee. The village committee is the highest decision-making body of the village.

tendency for male leaders to be addressed first, or men would normally be asked to take the first serve at prepared refreshments.

Women and Leadership Roles in the Church

The roles and status of women in churches in Solomon Islands vary from one church to another, some being much more flexible than others. This could be attributed to a number of factors, but the two main ones are the historical and doctrinal roots from which the respective church denominations emerged and the people's notions of culture or *kastom* tradition.²⁶ These two factors have been seen in the church's view of women in church leadership, both in administrative and pastoral positions. A close observation reveals that although the doctrinal teachings could play a part in supporting women, divergent cultural ideologies about women appear dominant in many churches in Solomon Islands.

The apparent flexibility is compromised and has some limits that encourage some forms of leadership within the hierarchy of the church to be decided on the basis of gender. For example, within the SSEC, although women are permitted to lead different aspects of worship, they are not allowed to become pastors or ministers.²⁷ They have always been restricted to the ministry of women: the deaconess ministry. In the UCSI,²⁸ women are allowed to become ordained and could assume the position of reverend ministers, but they are yet to be ordained as moderators.²⁹ Within the SDA, women are given some freedom to assume various ministerial functions in the church, but are restricted from higher levels of leadership, including assuming roles such as pastors or President of the church. In the

²⁶ The churches in Solomon Islands emerged from two prominent historical and doctrinal traditions: Catholicism and Protestantism. Traditionally, Catholic Church doctrine restricts women in liturgical worship. By contrast, the Protestant tradition is more supportive and flexible about the roles of women in church. The Catholic Church and the Anglican Church of Melanesia have inherited the Catholic tradition, while other churches, such as the South Seas Evangelical Church, and United Church, inherited the Protestant tradition. On the one hand, the ACOM adopts the Catholic tradition of leadership with the hierarchy of deacon, priest and bishop, along with the church sacraments; on the other hand, it shares some of the common Protestant beliefs. Thus, in many cases, the Anglican Church is referred to as a "bridging church" because it combines aspects of Catholic and the Protestant tradition.

²⁷ The position of pastor is similar to that of a catechist, while the position of minister is equated to a priest in the Anglican and Roman Catholics church hierarchies. However, in the Protestant tradition, the holders of the positions of pastor and minister only serve for a certain period of time and can be removed. In contrast to that, in the Catholic tradition, only the catechist can be removed while a priest performs religious duties until retirement.

²⁸ The UCSI was formerly part of the Methodist church that existed in both Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands.

²⁹ The position of moderator is similar to that of a bishop or Archbishop in the Catholic and Anglican Churches.

Catholic tradition, women are given some higher roles in the worship of the church. They normally assist the priest as lay ministers, but they are not allowed into the three-fold ministry of the church as bishop, priest, or deacon (Keith & Beu, 2008).

In the ACOM, the roles and status of women in leadership remain confined to ordinary mission work. Women are not allowed to perform a leadership role in the church's liturgical life, including appointments to the positions of deacon, priest or bishop (as with the Catholic Church). Women's leadership can be found only in the Mothers' Union, which is the only women's organisation in the church. In some parishes, women are not allowed to read from the lectern or give an announcement in church. They are not even allowed to serve in the church's sanctuary. In most Anglican churches, women sit on pews to the left, while men sit on the right.³⁰ While the gendered seating arrangement was a missionary invention, the local church communities comfortably accept it. This is because it is compatible with the local culture of *abu, tabu*, to keep specific gendered space, and to preserve social order (see Keesing, 1989; also see Jolly, 1989).

Although the Lambeth Conference of the Anglican Communion³¹ endorsed the ordination of women as far back in 1988 and a number of Anglican Provinces in the world have started ordaining women, the ACOM has refused to comply with this decision. The ACOM first discussed the issue of the ordination of women to the priesthood in its General Synod³² in 2002 and it was passed. However, following the constitutional requirement of the church, the matter has to be discussed and agreed upon in the respective diocesan Synods. It was later discovered in the General Synod in 2005 that a number of dioceses had voted against the ordination of women (ACOM General Synod *Minutes*, 2005). The motion was later sent to the dioceses to be debated in their respective Synods, but unfortunately it was turned down. Thus, the 2014 ACOM General Synod has not been able to discuss it again.³³ The

³⁰ Local leaders are more sensitive to women's dress-code in church. In most cases, women are under strict orders to wear dresses or skirts that reach below the knee. Further instructions are given to them to keep their hair neatly bound every time they go to church services.

³¹ The Lambeth Conference is the highest Anglican decision-making body of the federation of the bishops of the Anglican Communion.

³² A General Synod, headed by an Archbishop, is the highest decision-making body of a "Province", an independent member of the federation of the Anglican Church provinces. By constitution and tradition, every individual diocese has a veto. Therefore, an individual diocese can overturn a motion that is voted for by a large number of dioceses.

³³ Constitutionally, any amendments to the canons and constitution of the Church have to be assented by all nine.

motion is constrained by mixed feelings in the dioceses about the roles of a female priest and their social and cultural impact in the local church communities.

While local women face the challenge of gendered discrimination, they continue to reflect on the biblical and theological notions of the equality of all persons. They also utilise human rights ideologies and international conventions and guidelines to negotiate recognition and acceptance of women to assume formal leadership positions in the church.

Local Women and Human Rights

In dealing with the adverse effects of gender inequality and the variable situation faced by local women in Solomon Islands, human rights laws and ideologies have been utilised as platforms to effect transformation. However, the local women's approach to human rights ideologies is complex. Following the direction emphasised by the Ministry of Women, Youth, Children and Family Affairs (MWYCFA), local women, including local church women's groups, have invoked the UN human rights conventions such as Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) to deal with their social situation (McDougall, 2003; Cox, 2017; Soaki, 2017). Locally, CEDAW is regarded as a global protective mechanism that defends women from being discriminated against and promotes their rights (Merry 2003). It is believed that it will improve women's conditions, especially the need to participate in socio-economic and political development, and encourage women to contribute and participate in decision-making in their respective workplaces and communities.

Utilising the human rights principles, and with support of international agencies, women have promoted an act of parliament to protect family members, especially protection against violence. In 2014, the Family Protection Bill was passed by the National Parliament in the Solomon Island's capital Honiara. The legislative framework aims to protect family members from domestic violence, and the acts or threats including physical, sexual, psychological and economic abuse³⁴ especially for women and children (although it covers men as well).

³⁴ See <http://www.parliament.gov.sb/index.php?q=node/819>. Accessed on 19 March 2018.

Based on international human rights principles, each 8 March, local women mark the International Day of Women to promote their interests, using the event to appeal for equal rights and promote their need for recognition. Furthermore, the event calls for recognition of women and encourages their participation in social and economic development, including political leadership and governance. This women's rights activism has filtered through to the churches. Although in some churches, women do not openly discuss human rights ideas, these notions have generated new critical perspectives concerning patriarchal leadership in churches.

However, despite the growing influence of human rights ideologies and positive local responses, mostly from local women's organisations (McDougall, 2003; Cox, 2017), no systematic progress is emerging as to whether the CEDAW and its foundational objectives can be achieved in the short term in Solomon Islands. There has not been tangible practical support from the government, churches, or NGOs, although rhetorically they have affirmed their objectives (see Biersack, Jolly & Macintyre, 2016; Macintyre & Spark, 2017: 12-13). There is no clear commitment as to whether the national government and its agencies would fully implement CEDAW policies and programmes, although it is often stated in official policies and public statements. Discrimination against women in workplaces, and the trend of denying them access to certain formal leadership roles within government institutions, and churches, has remained a common practice addressed by the government. In conducting research on the global implications of human rights ideologies, Sally Engle Merry, (2001; 2003) has pointed out the dynamics and complications that most countries like Solomon Islands (especially developing countries) face in implementing CEDAW policies. Merry (2003) explains, although CEDAW has a clear mandate for women, and that 171 nations have ratified its policies, its visions and strategies have become too complex to implement (Merry, 2003:994). Human rights agencies, especially CEDAW, have no absolute legal jurisdiction, as with most UN conventions, to enforce "sanctions on noncompliant states" (Merry, 2003:942). However, CEDAW's principles can be implemented in member states as a result of government commitment and accompanying legislation to give them legal effect.

As Merry (2003) has argued, human rights' strategic objectives could not be easily implemented broadly in some parts of the world. Based on her studies about the ways other communities, including Hilo in Hawai'i, deal with wife battering and victims of violence,

Merry (2003) cites three competing institutions which exist in most communities: first the feminist liberal organisations, second the religious entities (churches), and thirdly cultural institutions. Overall, while these institutions aim to reproduce a common good to protect the victims of violence, their approaches and emphasis appear to be opposite. For instance, the feminist liberal organisations ground their approach in the rights of the victims and seek egalitarian positions for them. The religious organisations seek the salvation and healing of victims based on the authority of the Bible, and locate them in relation to a more complementary hierarchical position, with the husband being the head. The “traditional cultural approach emphasises repentance, forgiveness and reconciliation and seeks reunification and a sense of ownership of place” (Merry, 2003:41).

Reflecting on the effect of these models on violence against women in Solomon Islands, they appear to be competing with each and have caused a setback to a common approach to violence against women. *Solomon Islands Family Health Safety Study Report* (2009) has highlighted some of the common reasons which enable women to consistently stay with or return to a violent partner in situations of domestic abuse. These include, ‘the partner is being forgiven’, ‘he is being loved’, ‘she didn’t want to leave the children’, and far more common, is the respect for the ‘sanctity of marriage’ (SIHSSR, 2009: 9). Over 98% of Solomon Islands’ population claim to belong to a form of Christianity, and in such a context, despite being faced with violence, women hold high regard for the sanctity of their marriages. Not only that, but culturally it can be publicly humiliating for a woman to divorce her husband or be labelled as *woman ia hem divos*, a divorced woman. Divorce is not a personal matter, rather a collective one, and public shame is experienced by relatives on both sides if a divorce is instituted. The couple would certainly lose their status and be regarded in public as *secon han*³⁵ second-hand. Although there is constant pressure from human rights and gender equity groups to deal with domestic violence through legal and practical means, in Solomon Islands this has not been regarded as relevant to the local context, although some cases have gone through the legal process. The pressures of the church and local customs have collaboratively acted in opposition to the feminist liberal approach to domestic violence. In the case of Solomon Islands, organisations which are shaped by feminist ideologies have always resorted to resolving violence, such as wife-

³⁵ A Solomon Islands pidgin transliterated word for second hand. It normally refers to clothes that have been used and then are displayed for sale and reuse. By extension, it refers to a person of lower status because of their immoral conduct and reputation within the community. A divorced person has such a reputation. Divorce would always embarrass both families. The parental families’ public reputations will be questioned as to why they have not provided advice and appropriate guidance to the couples.

battering through legal processes, and have eventually led to divorce. In contrast, the church and local custom advocate resolving the problem through cultural and church based peace, and reconciliation processes (cf. SIHSSR, 2009). These are powerful institutions in Solomon Islands, hence in most instances, cases of violence were resolved through their respective rituals of restitutions and reconciliations, and could easily be accepted.

Women's Groups and Organisations

Women's organisations and groups are powerful and have transformative power when they have shared aims and goals to achieve (Pollard, 2003; Kabeer, 2011; Spark, 2013). They are generally regarded as core initiative-takers in issues concerning gender and women's development (Soaki, 2017: 98). Gendered experiences of poverty, discrimination and suppression have provided an impetus for women's empowerment and development that has consequently generated a growth in women's groups and organisations both in rural and urban areas. Apart from the church-established women's organisations (for example, Mothers' Union, the SSEC Women's Fellowship, the UCSI Women's Fellowship, the Dorcas Women's group of the SDA) women have also developed organisations to deal with their personal and collective empowerment and economic development, women's participation in national politics, and other political interests.

Various women's groups have been formed in Honiara and the provinces of Solomon Islands. In Honiara, the formation of Solomon Islands Women in Business Association (SIWIBA) in 2004 was set up to provide economic empowerment for women living in the city. Originally, the organisation mainly focused on the economic interests of elite women, mostly government and private sector employees. However, it was later extended to include other self-employed women in the city. More recently, the SIWIBA has been extended to rural communities in the provinces (*Solomon Star*, 13 October 2017).

In rural communities, local women have established groups that focus on social and economic interests. In 'Are'Are, Malaita province, the formation of the West 'Are'Are Rokotanikeni Association (WARA) has seen an increased participation of rural women in micro-finance and money-saving schemes. However, while the organisation has engaged in micro-economic development activities, central to the organisation is the imperative to provide social support for women and participation in local communities, including churches. It is a common trend among Melanesian women's organisations that despite the

secular nature of women's groups, prayer and Bible sharing play an important role in their development (Dickson-Waiko, 2003; Jolly 2003; Pollard, 2003). In rural villages, women are the main providers of important services, inclusive of their own families, community and church programmes. Given those roles, women need to be socially recognised and financially equipped to meet the demands placed upon them.



Figure 23: Members of West 'Are'Are Rokotanikeni Association (WARA)

They were presented with three solar freezers by WorldFish. **Source:** *Solomon Star*, 28 February 2018.

The local women's groups have mixed objectives. In a way, economic empowerment is not always the focus of some of the rural women's groups. The objectives are mixed. Women's groups were established to expand capacity building that would equip them in their roles in the management of their homes, and also to support local church communities. In

Solomon Islands, capacity building for rural women has always been focused on offering training that furthers support for their domestic responsibilities in households, and for catering for village activities such as church fellowships, meetings, conferences and synods (see McDougall, 2003; Eriksen, 2005). Training in that capacity mostly covers home management, Western methods of cooking, and floral artwork. The impact of modernity in rural communities means local women ought to step up and equip themselves with useful skills to deal with related demands in their respective homes and communities.



Figure 24: A local women’s group

Members of the Self-Employed Women’s Association (SEWA) of North Malaita attending a floral training course. **Source:** *Solomon Star*, 16 October 2017.

One of the areas that women are concerned with is the non-participation of women in the formulation of government policies on social and economic activities that have impacted negatively on family life.



Figure 25: The Young Women's Parliamentary Group (YWPG).

Source: *Solomon Star*, 27 February 2018.

In 1994, the Young Women's Parliamentary Group (YWPG) was formed to learn about parliamentary roles and parliament's functions. The main objective of the group is to learn how to work with successive parliamentary leaders on policies that help to provide possibilities for social and economic justice for women and communities. For instance, in 2013 the group assisted and contributed to drafting a petition against the short-bus route in Honiara city and presented it to parliament. The support for women's participation in national political leadership is also part of the group's advocacy programme. The formation of YWPG marks a shift from the conventional women's interest to utilising legislative mechanisms through lobbying and intensifying pressure on male MPs to address the constraining factors that affect their lives through effective policies and acts of parliament (Macintyre & Spark, 2017).

While YWPG women have become active in lobbying MPs and facilitating influence on policies and parliamentary decisions in developing more gender-inclusive policies, women in provinces are also active, working in collaboration with the Provincial Council of Women to formulate policies on empowerment and development for local communities, especially women and families, living in the provinces.



Figure 26: The Malaita Provincial Council of Women (MPCW)

At a launching of a Malaita Women’s Empowerment and Development Policy (MWEDP) with the Provincial Premier. **Source:** *Solomon Star*, 12 March 2018.

Recent reports have highlighted that so far Guadalcanal and Western Provinces, and recently Malaita Province, have taken the lead in documenting women’s empowerment and development policies. The collaboration of women in this way, has always been seen as an effective step in pursuing gender equality, but more significantly, women’s empowerment and development.

Conclusion

The prevalent unequal gender relations and the low status of women in Solomon Islands are realised due to the influence of local culture, and *kastom*, aligning with and consolidated by missionary and colonial ideology about the roles and position of women in society. The chapter has provided a background context to Solomon Islands, and an overview of the socio-cultural, economic, religious and political condition in which women live. It discussed the constraints of women’s livelihoods and experience of women’s discrimination believed to be the consequential impact of intersections of indigenous cultural beliefs, colonial and missionary ideologies (explained in more detail in chapter four and chapter five), and family expectations on the roles and status of women. While, there has been a push by local women, and support by international agencies to raise the status of women, ensuring an equitable balance between men and women in leadership (and indeed in all walks of life) the core anticipated objective has not been realised. Both

government and churches have affirmative policies to recognise women as equal to men, but in practice their moral obligations have not been realised. Nevertheless, despite inequitable treatment and the conditions women face both at national and rural levels, moves towards personal and collective empowerment and development continue to emerge.

Chapter 4: Historical Profile of the South Seas Evangelical Church, and the Anglican Church of Melanesia

Introduction

Gender relations in the SSEC and the ACOM have long been shaped by churches' respective historical Christian missionary dynamics and approaches to local cultural practices and traditional beliefs. For example, the SSEC was founded on conservative evangelical theology, and its approach to social and cultural life is strongly guided by these principles. The church believes that the Bible is the absolute and inerrant word of God, and further emphasises that the Holy Spirit is an agency through which freedom is generated in the lives of the people (Ernst, 1994; see also, Maggio, 2016: 168-184). The church is non-denominational, and opposed to traditional customary practices, and has sought to break with them.

Comparatively, the ACOM has emerged from a rather strong background based on 'accommodative' missiological principals. The missiological philosophy recognises the salvation of all human beings and accommodates their local cultures and social life practices as God given instruments for order and social enhancement. Contrary to SSEC, the ACOM's approach to the Bible differs from the SSEC. It does not preserve the fundamental belief of *Sola Scriptura* (the Bible alone) which the SSEC has honoured. Unlike the SSEC, ACOM has a prominent and well defined governance structures that is institutionally bureaucratic with details tiers of powers.

This chapter provides historical coverage of the fundamental principles of the early missionary agencies from which the SSEC and the ACOM emerged. It discusses the contrasts and similarities of both churches in terms of their missionary principles, governance and administrative structure. The SSEC developed from a conservative evangelical organisation, the Queensland Kanaka Mission (QKM) (1886-1906) (Griffith, 1977; SSEC, 2011; Moore, 2017) through its Solomon Islands branch, the South Sea Evangelical Mission (1907-1964) (Hilliard, 1969; Griffith, 1977; Moore, 2017). The ACOM grew out of the Melanesian Mission, which was established in 1849, and gained independence as a provincial independent church in 1976 (Whiteman, 1978; Hilliard, 1984; Davidson, 1996).

The chapter discusses the contrasts and similarities of the founding Christian missionary beliefs that belied leadership and governance structures of the two churches in relation to gender, and explores their approaches to social and cultural life in local communities especially women. The chapter is important because as it provides background information for understanding the complex dynamics of gender relationships in the SSEC and the ACOM, and constraints on women's potential leadership, empowerment and development in the respective local churches, particularly in Small Malaita. The chapter begins with an overview of the SSEC and then moves on to consider the ACOM.

The History of the South Sea Evangelical Church (SSEC)

The SSEC originated from a conservative evangelical movement, the Queensland Kanaka Mission (QKM) (1886-1907), which was renamed the South Sea Evangelical Mission (SSEM) (1907-1964). The QKM embarked on a special evangelical mission with the objective of saving the souls of Pacific Islanders who were recruited to Queensland to work as labourers on the sugarcane plantations in the second half of the 19th century.

The fundamental rationale that informs foreign Christian missions is the imperative of obedience to the Great Commission, and the evangelisation of non-Christians, as recorded in the Gospel of Matthew Chapter 28 (Boutilier 1978, Foreman, 1978). However, the focus of missionary objectives and activities in the Pacific, particularly in Melanesia, extended beyond evangelism. Foreign missionaries were highly concerned about the islanders' allegedly poor socio-economic conditions and the impact of indigenous religious beliefs and custom on everyday life. One of the areas of concern was the oppressed state of women due to the highly segregated traditional gender roles and status in many Pacific societies (Jolly & Macintyre, 1989). From the outset, missionaries advanced new socio-Christian spaces, ethics and principles. In essence, while this missionary objective to free women was advocated, it has not been fully realised. It was difficult because local people were deeply entrenched within the indigenous religious and cultural beliefs and practices of their societies.

Labour Recruitment and the Queensland Kanaka Mission

From the 1860s, European businesses began recruiting Melanesians as plantation labourers, mostly to Fiji and Queensland (Australia). These included violent incidences of people trafficking. In 1870 European traders began kidnapping men from Malaita and neighbouring islands to work in Australia (Price & Baker, 1975; Mar-Banivanua, 2007;

Moore, 2007; 2017). Malaita was the largest source of labourers for both Fiji and Queensland. Between 1871 and 1911, a total of 14,447 were recruited which formed 58.1% of the total labourers from Solomon Islands. Malaitans in Queensland during the same period numbered 9,298 (Siegel, 1985; Moore 2007:217). However, there has been a continuing debate over the question as to whether Pacific Islanders who worked in Queensland plantations were kidnapped or coerced into work or voluntarily signed up to indentured labour contracts. There is evidence for all three patterns of labour in the indenture era.

Table 2: Solomon Islands Indentured Labourers in Queensland and Fiji 1870-1911

Province	1870-1887			1881-1911			1870-	1911
	Queensland	Fiji	Total	Queensland	Fiji	Total	Total	%
Central	971	81	1,052	1,575	19	1,594	2,646	10.64
Choiseul	58	27	85	0	0	0	85	0.34
Guadalcanal	1,575	892	2,467	2,613	322	2,935	5,402	21.72
Isabel	92	90	182	116	31	147	329	1.32
Makira	509	563	1,072	520	97	617	1,689	6.79
Malaita	2,216	2,727	4,943	7,082	2,422	9,504	14,447	58.1
Rennell & Bellona	65	4	69	0	0	0	69	0.27
Temotu	26	2	28	6	0	6	34	0.13
Western	130	34	164	0	0	0	164	0.65
TOTAL	5,642	4,420	10,062	11,912	2,891	14,803	24,865	

Source: Moore, C. (2007). The Misappropriation of Malaitan Labour: Historical Origins of the Recent Solomon Islands Crisis. *The Journal of Pacific History*, Vol. 42, 2, pp. 211-232; original source: Price, A., & Baker, E. (1975). Origins of the Pacific Islands Labourers in Queensland, 1863-1904. *The Journal of Pacific History*, Vol. 11, 2. Pp.106-121; Siegel, J. (1985). Origins of Pacific Islands Labourers in Fiji, *Journal of Pacific History*, Vol. 20, 2, pp. 42-54. *Used with permission from The Journal of Pacific History.*

As a consequence of coercion or free choice, or some combination of both, by the 1880s large numbers of Islanders from Solomon Islands and Vanuatu had been recruited to work in Queensland where they aspired to obtain manufactured goods, overseas adventures or to escape situations at home. Plantation life in a foreign land involved new daily work routines under new customs and authority without the family and community life of home. The Islanders adapted but experienced a lack of social order. They took up European practices such as alcohol consumption, smoking tobacco, gambling and swearing that disturbed many European Christians like Florence Young. Christian evangelism was regarded as necessary to improve the Islanders' moral and social conditions and was also expected to make them easier to manage under the hard conditions of plantation work.

However, there was an impasse among the missionary agencies. Most, such as the London Missionary Society (LMS), the Presbyterian Mission and the Melanesian Mission were already working in islands such as the New Hebrides, the Loyalty Islands (New Caledonia) and Solomon Islands (Hilliard, 1969), but many of the recruits were listed as ‘heathen.’ Malaitans in particular, with only a few Christians at home, fitted the stereotype of ‘heathen savages’ stereotyped by Europeans in the labour trade. European traders found this beneficial in terms of labour as the so-called ‘heathen savages’, were illiterate and could allegedly therefore not understand the nature of the conditions of wage labour. These stereotypes facilitated labour exploitation. While Pacific Islanders faced new socio-religious and economic conditions in Queensland, existing mission agencies in Queensland had varying policies about evangelistic work among the Islanders. For instance, the Melanesian Mission concentrated its work on the islands, while the LMS did not want to appear as endorsing the labour trade (Hilliard, 1969).

European evangelical Christians in Queensland with sympathy for the Islanders responded by forming a special mission for them, which was founded by Florence Young in 1887 on her brother’s plantation near Bundaberg as the Queensland Kanaka Mission (QKM). According to Hilliard

She immediately began a Sunday class for the labourers on the estate, with the Bible as textbook and Pidgin English as the medium of instruction. The school flourished, classes were increased and the first baptism was held in 1885, and a base for the foundation of the Queensland Kanaka Mission was laid in 1886 (Hilliard, 1969: 3; Young, 1926).

The mission was soon extended to the Bundaberg district where one quarter of the 10,000 Islander labourers were employed. Leading this expansion was Florence Young, described as a Victorian religious woman whose emancipation had propelled her to the commanding authority of the mission (Hilliard, 1969). This chapter will highlight her influence in setting the doctrinal principles and spiritual benchmark for the QKM, which later became the SSEC.

The Founding Philosophy of QKM

The fundamental principle underlying the formation of the QKM and consequently the SSEC was the salvation of souls. Melanesians were perceived as being lost and needing to

be saved. In a letter to the South Sea Islanders' employers in Bundaberg in January 1887, Florence Young and her sister formally declared the aim of the mission for the South Sea Islanders.

Dear Sirs,

... We now appeal to you for your sympathy and cooperation. The *aim* of this Mission is, by God's help, to bring to those who are yet in darkness the glad tidings of the Gospel, in obedience to our Lord's command. (Matt. xxviii. 18-20). It will be supported by the *free-will offerings* of those who wish to help in the work. Subscriptions will be thankfully received by the undersigned, but we wish it to be distinctly understood that no one will be pressured to give. What we do ask, is your help in providing facilities for those classes we desire to have on the various plantations. We propose that the Missionary should hold a class every evening and 2 or 3 on Sunday. Thus, by arranging for 8 or 9 central, weekly classes, a great number of Kanakas could be reached. Any further information required can be obtained from the Secretary. Hoping the Mission will accomplish a great and good work amongst the Kanakas. (Griffith, 1977: 19-20; Young, 1926: 47-48)

This letter marks the birth of the QKM. The QKM had four fundamental principles. First, the Mission's primary aim was to achieve the salvation of the Islanders' souls, set them free from the darkness of their religions, and honour the lordship of Jesus Christ. This would entail a total break and discontinuity with local traditional cultural practices that were deemed incompatible with Christian teachings. Secondly, the Mission would be non-sectarian in governance and accept only followers who were truly committed to their faith in the lordship of Jesus Christ and were obedient to him. Thirdly, for the support of the Mission, the QKM adopted the faith model initiated by George Muller and Hudson Taylor of the Inland China Mission. Florence Young had a long association with Muller and Taylor of the Inland China Mission prior to her founding the QKM. She was closely associated with this China Mission, having herself worked as a missionary there from 1891 to 1900. The Mission would depend entirely on God for the provision of its work. Fourthly, the Mission outlined that it would always seek to act in obedience to the Great Commission where Jesus had commanded his disciples to go out into the world. In effect, the QKM was tasked to teach, preach and baptise the new converts in the name of the Father, the Son and Holy Spirit as clearly presented in Matthew Chapter 28:18-20 (Young, 1926: 42-48; Griffith, 1977:17-19). These mission objectives and principles provided the fundamental guidelines to the QKM and later the SSEC. The people who contributed to the formation of the QKM were mostly Florence Young's relatives and consequently the SSEM was

heavily influenced by her whole family. In essence, her personal Christian convictions and ideas of womanhood shaped the whole mission.

Florence Young and the QKM SSEM

Florence Young was an energetic woman, a staunch evangelical Christian, embodying a Victorian model of womanhood (Moore, 2009). She was born in 1856 at Motueka, Nelson, in New Zealand, the sixth daughter of Henry Young, and Catherine Anne (Moore, 2009: 3). As noted by Moore (2009) Florence was surrounded by Christians in her youth and her parent's religious influences as members of the Plymouth Open Brethren enormously affected her later spiritual life. "The Brethren were Protestant Christians, defined by their Biblicism and conversionism. They rejected close involvement with the state, hierarchical church government, especially priestly orders and rituals beyond those of the Bible, particularly the New Testament" (Moore, 2009:4). Under the influence of evangelical theology, formal roles and responsibilities were open and anyone could preside over the celebration of the Holy Communion or preach. The Brethren's view was that the coming Millennium would be a state marked by holiness, inspired by Jesus and each member would be called a brother or a sister (Moore, 2009: 4).

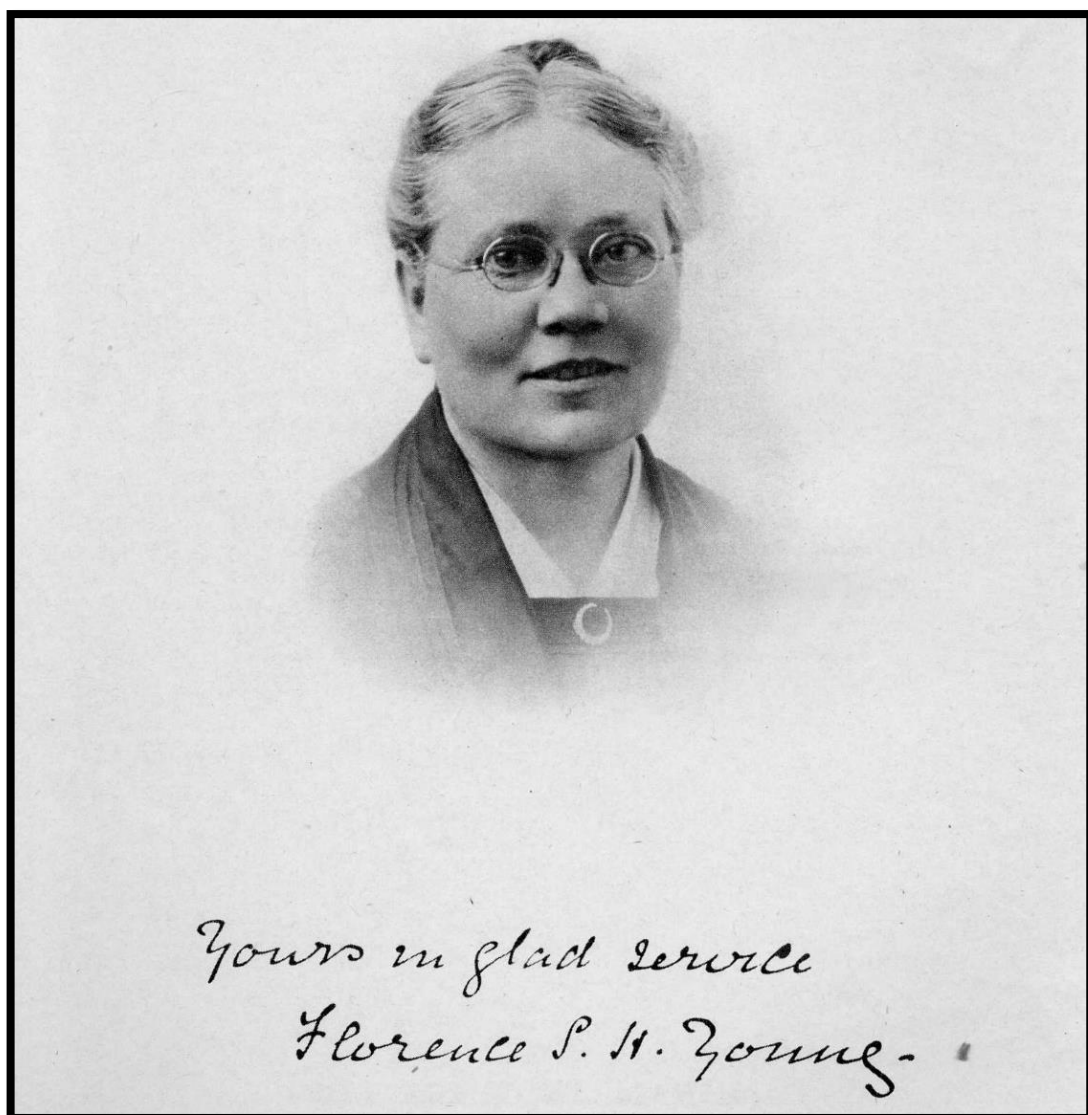


Figure 27: Florence Young, founder of QKM and SSEM (SSEC)

Source: Swiss Studio, Sydney, ca. 2015 (British Museum collections). *Used with permission from British Museum.*

Florence Young was also influenced by the Keswick Movement, an international group founded in the Lake District in England in 1875. The movement owed its origin to Anglicans and Baptists and it focused on achieving a deeper Christian experience of God based on the Bible. The Keswick Movement emphasised new birth, fullness of the spirit, Christian holiness, and sanctification. Holiness was thought of as a powerful base to revitalise English Christianity, leading to an urge to engage in mission. The Brethren and Keswick views on sanctification are relatively different. The difference is that the Brethren emphasised conversion as a significant stage of sanctification, while the Keswick

Movement made 'full surrender' an important stage of surrender (Bebbington, 157-159). The Brethren believed that sanctification is a quality of life as a result of faith at conversion, while the Keswick Movement saw sanctification as subsequent full surrender. One of the influential Open Brethren speakers of the Keswick movement was Hudson Taylor, who was also the founder of the China Inland Mission, whose influence led Florence Young to envision and form the QKM (Moore, 2009).



Figure 28: Deck and Griffiths families

Florence Young had influences from the Deck and Griffiths families who were Baptist and Plymouth Brethren. **Source:** British Museum. *Used with permission from the British Museum.*

The Puritan and Baptist traditions, the Open Brethren, the Keswick conventions, and other evangelical movements had a significant impact on the foundational Christian beliefs and worldview of the SSEM towards the social life and culture of the labourers. Their influences on the formation of the QKM-SSEM began with Florence Young's participation in the Young Peoples Scripture's Union (YPSU) and the formation of a branch in

Bundaberg, Queensland (Moore, 2009:5). The YPSU was an international evangelical Christian movement founded in 1867. Central to its activities was Bible reading, which formed the basis for Christian understanding. With the assistance of Miss Florence Buchanan, Young established many branches in Queensland with an estimated membership of 4,000. Their attention was drawn to the South Sea Islanders mostly from the New Hebrides and Solomon Islands who formed the large labour force at the Fairymead Plantation belonging to her family and the surrounding plantations and farms (Young, 1926; Moore, 2009: 5-6). Florence Young explained the task that she would undertake.

We are employing at this time some eighty Kanakas, South Sea Islanders from the New Hebrides and the Solomon Islands... I am ashamed to say that I had never taken the smallest interest in missions to the heathen. I thought the people in the Homelands were far more important... But now God brought me for the first time into contact with men and women who had never heard of Christ, and for whom nothing was being done to teach them the way of salvation. And it seemed dreadful. I soon learned to love them. There is something very attractive about these South Sea Islanders. Merry, warm-hearted, and very responsive to kindness. Yet there was another and darker side. For they were men, not children. Men with fierce passions, who came from lands where savage murders and cannibalism were freely practised. They acquired only too readily the white man's vices. Drinking, gambling, swearing and fighting were almost universal (Young, 1926: 38-39).

Young's Christian spiritual inspiration persuaded her to begin her evangelistic work, starting at Fairymead in Bundaberg with the first class of ten men with one housegirl by the name of *La-as-si* (Moore, 2009:6; 2017: 145). The members were called 'brother' and 'sister'. These terms were fundamental to the new Christian order (and continue to be used), as they formed a new socio-religious community of kinship. The influence of the Brethren conservative theological and evangelical thinking and practice seems to have constituted a new kind of freedom different from the Anglo-Catholic views on the roles and status of women and consequently led to the formation of the QKM.

From Queensland to Solomon Islands: From the QKM to the SSEM

The QKM was effective, and the Islanders, mostly Solomon Islanders, began actively practising their Christian faith and assisted Florence Young and other missionaries in making personal evangelical witness visits to various sugar plantations in Queensland. By 1896, ten years from the humble beginning of the QKM, a total of 1,089 converts had been baptised, and some Islanders began returning to their home islands after their two to three year contracts had lapsed, bringing the gospel back to Solomon Islands with them.

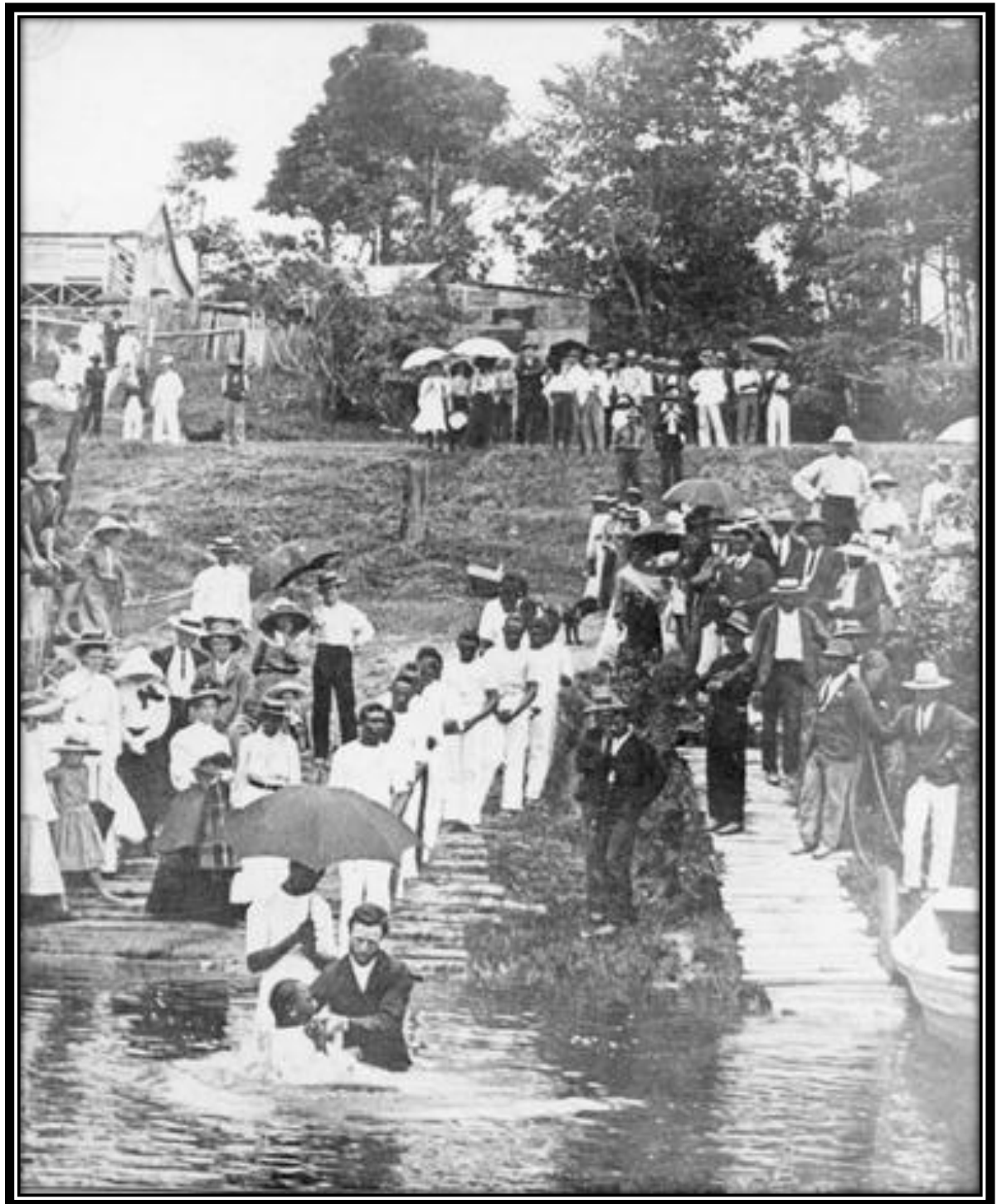


Figure 29: The baptism of Melanesian labourer converts in Queensland

Baptism by a QKM missionary at the Johnstone River at Innisfail, Queensland. **Source:** The Queenslander Photo, 1908, State Library Queensland. *Used with permission from the British Museum.*

All the converts and baptised Islanders attended Bible classes. Teaching was in Pijin English, a *lingua franca* which all the Islanders spoke and understood. As interest in reading and writing, combined with the enthusiasm in their newly found faith grew, the Islanders

took a bold stand by purchasing hundreds of copies of the Bible, particularly the New Testament, together with the Sankey hymn books. Bible pictures became effective teaching aids and aroused a lot of interest. The King James Version and the hymns written by Sankey were the principal tools for their future mission (Hilliard, 1969:44).

The labour trade between the Western Pacific and the Australia was based on a series of renewable three year contracts. Towards the end of the nineteenth century opposition to the recruitment of the Pacific labourers from the Australian electorate increased. Restrictions on immigration were one of the drivers of Australian Federation in 1901. In that year the newly formed Commonwealth Parliament passed the Immigration Restriction Act (Rawlings, 2017: 119-120). The enactment of the Commonwealth Parliament law on *Immigration Restriction* in 1901, required all Pacific Islander labourers to be repatriated from the plantations by 1906 (Griffiths, 1977:20).

The news about the repatriation of the Island labourers, especially to Malaita, was met with a mixed reaction. While some felt the inspiration to go home and share their newly found faith, this inspiration was challenged by difficulties back in the Islands. Others protested their repatriation as they desired to stay on to work for money and enjoy the Western goods in Queensland (Pollard, 2006; quoting Naitoro, 1993). After being repatriated to the Islands, some returned to their former religion, while others were killed. Others stood firm for their faith in the midst of the religious challenge and the community expectation for them to participate in traditional rituals and ceremonies. One of the successful and notable Queensland repatriated QKM converts was Peter Abu'ofa, son of a chief in North Malaita. He was baptised in Bundaberg in 1892 and was repatriated three years later in 1895 (Hilliard, 1969:45). The opposition from his kinsmen, including his father, obliged Peter to build a small leaf house at the coast in Malu'u. In the midst of these difficulties, Peter continued to convert a few people, especially children and women (Pollard, 2006: 124).

Encouraged by the appeal for assistance from Peter Abu'ofa and others who had already been repatriated and begun evangelising, a convention of the QKM was held in 1906 and formally endorsed a branch of the mission to be established in the Islands as the South Sea Evangelical Mission (SSEM). The work had actually begun two years earlier after Florence Young, a female companion and three male missionaries visited Malaita in April 1904 for the first time (Hilliard, 1969; Griffiths, 1977).



Figure 30: Male students in military like parade at Onepusu³⁶

Students were recruited to become future evangelists, a men's band, armed with the *Master's* (God's) word to proclaim. **Source:** N. Deck photo (*British Museum*). *Used with permission from the British Museum.*

The pioneering visit of Florence Young to Malu'u on Malaita was partly to secure land and to build a headquarters for the newly formed SSEM. While the Malu'u Christian converts were excited at the presence of the QKM European missionaries in the home village, the plan to purchase a piece of land was obstructed by local resentment against the repatriation of the North Malaita Christian converts. There were also suspicions that the QKM was an agency of Europeans in Australia seeking a foothold in their native land, given the way Australian Aboriginal land had been alienated by the white Australians. Thus, they refused to grant land to the QKM at Malu'u (Hilliard, 1969; Pollard, 2006).

³⁶ One of the fundamental missionary philosophies of SSEM (now SSEC) was that Christian converts were considered as a band of soldiers of Christ armoured with the word of God as a sword to battle against Satan. This idea was focused on Biblical texts such as 2 Timothy 2:3-4; and Ephesians 6: 13-14. There were men's band and women's band.

Despite the concerns of British colonial officials for the safety of Europeans travelling to Malaita, Florence Young made a second trip around the island, visiting the Christian converts and searching for suitable sites for future mission stations. Onepusu, a small peninsula on the west coast within the 'Are'Are zone south of Langalanga Lagoon was chosen, and acquired as the headquarters of the Mission in 1906. The first South Sea Evangelical Mission (SSEM) boarding school for boys and girls was opened the same year. Onepusu was used as the power-house of the Mission, at the same time forming a safe haven for the repatriated Christian converts who feared opposition in their home areas (Hilliard, 1969:48).



Figure 31: South Sea Islanders ready for deportation at Cairns, 1906

Police (in white helmets) searching luggage for guns and ammunition before deportation. **Source:** Ruddle photo, 1906 (*The Queenslander*, State Library of Queensland). Used with permission of the State Library of Queensland.

The final deportation of the Pacific Islanders from Queensland in 1907 marked the end of the QKM, and the birth of Solomon Islands' branch which was renamed the South Sea

Evangelical Mission (SSEM). In the twenty-one years of the QKM's existence, 2,484 Islanders were baptised and a quarter of these converts were Malaitans (Hilliard, 1969: 48; Corris, 1980). A large number of Solomon Islanders, mostly Malaitans, held on strongly to their Christian faith and supported each other. From 1906 to 1908, the number of villages connected with the Mission increased from 16 to 44. In Small Malaita, Waisusu along the Maramasike passage and Roone on the South East coast emerged as the main SSEM villages.

As Hilliard (1969) has noted, although the majority of converts were from Malaita, about a hundred were from Guadalcanal and a few others from Makira. In 1892 a former labourer started a school among his people at Malageti on the south coast of Guadalcanal and during the repatriation period David Sango began another school at Talisi in 1911. Around this period the SSEM was established at Wainoni Bay by Peter Wetigo, and in 1912, a mission station was established there, linked to Onepusu.

For the first 21 years from 1885, the QKM/SSEM was mostly under the direction of Florence Young, her sister in-law, Emily Young, and her niece Catherine Deck. Although a number of men were also involved, their contribution to the Mission was mainly supervised by Florence Young. She was the superintendent of the QKM and then, for another twenty years after that until 1926, the SSEM (Hilliard, 1969; Griffiths, 1977; Pollard, 2006). Soon after Florence Young's leadership came to an end, the SSEM was presided over by Miss Catherine Deck, her niece. The leadership of the mission was mostly therefore in the hands of expatriate women.

The Missionary Approach to Women's Education and Formation of the Women's Group

The SSEM begun offering training for local women in 1906. Initially women's training was carried out alongside their husbands. While women were taught to read the Bible, and basic Christian teachings, their training was focused on domestic household skills, such as cooking, sewing, and home management (Scheyvens, 2003; for comparison with Vanuatu, see Douglas, 2003). This was designed for them to offer support to their husbands who were trained to be church leaders.

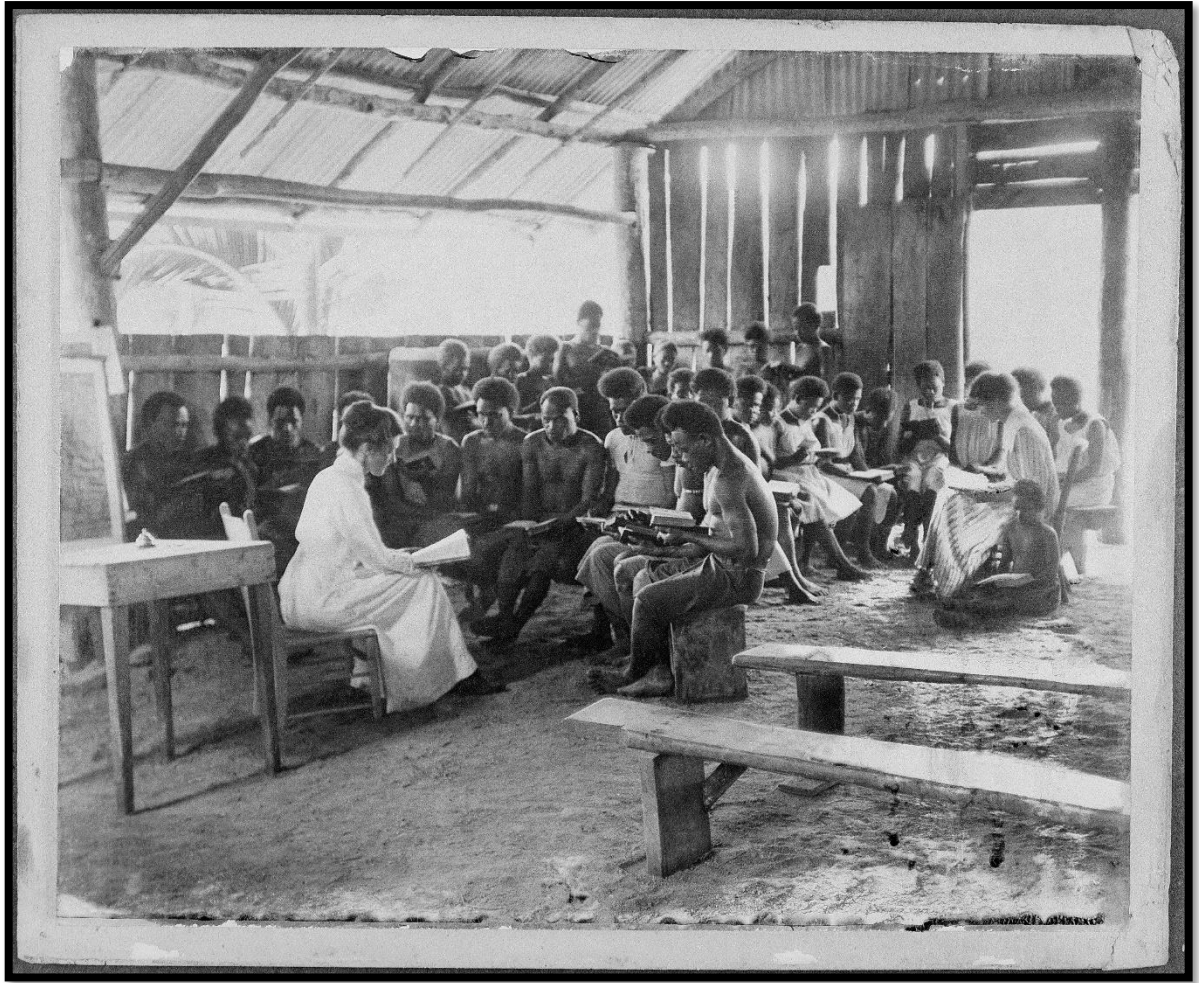


Figure 32: Joan Deck teaching the men at Onepusu

The training of local men was focused on leadership, while women's training focused on Christian domesticity. Here Joan Deck is teaching the men, while Jesse Deck, wife of Northcote Deck taught the women in the background. **Source:** N. Deck, 2010 (British Museum), Burt, 2015: 40. *Used with permission from the British Museum.*

In 1911 a school for men was moved to Baunani plantation, some 32 kilometres north. The plantation was owned by the Young family's 'Malayta Company', managed by brothers Ernest and Horace Young. Here the Queensland labour system was introduced so that young men would work in the plantation during the day and then attend school sessions in the evening (Pollard, 2006:142).

This arrangement left Onepusu Bible School for the training of young women and the younger boys. Under *kastom* (custom), the boys were too young to be assigned a gender identity because they can move back and forth between male and female until they reach adolescence and become sensitive to their maleness. Hence their residence with young

women students did not pose a major problem at Onepusu from 1911 onward. The women's school syllabus struck a balance between Christian teachings and the women's perceived modesty. Besides Bible studies and literacy, healthcare and hygiene were also introduced to the women, but not taught to the young men at either Onepusu or Baunani schools (Pollard, 2006:142; cf. Choi & Jolly, 2014).

After seven years, when the Malayta Company relocated to the Russell Islands, the young men's school at Baunani was moved to Onepusu and merged into a gender-streamed school for both men and women. Onepusu became a central school and continued to offer courses for both men and women. The school was divided into junior and senior categories. Junior students stayed for a shorter period from one to two years, while the course for senior students went for three to four years. Although the school syllabus appears to have included some modern academic courses such as arithmetic, reading and writing in English, dictation and composition, these were not the priority and it focused mainly on religious studies and choral singing (Pollard, 2006; quoting Sullivan's 1954 work).

This continued until 1920, when Onepusu only accepted young men capable of working in plantations, who could speak Pijin, and were mature enough for leadership. In 1913, a total of 64 students was recruited and the number increased to 160 in 1933 (Hilliard, 1969: 56). The school syllabus included reading the English Bible, writing, arithmetic, methods of Bible interpretation, church government, and discipline. Training was also geared towards the leadership and pastoring in local churches. The young men were taught personal commitment and evangelism and were encouraged to engage in a regular 'preaching band' to learn the art of public preaching through testimony such as sharing spiritual experiences and problems, and on monthly basis, united prayer³⁷ would be conducted (Hilliard, 1969:56). Young women were not enrolled as missionary strategy emphasised local leadership for men.

However, the Afio Bible School began for young women on Small Malaita in 1934, while Onepusu became solely a young men's school (Hilliard, 1969; Griffiths, 1977; Pollard, 2006: 143). After the Second World War, Onepusu developed into a regional Bible

³⁷ United prayer was normally practised in Queensland by the QKM Islanders. It was an open-air prayer meeting on a field at night in an intercessory mode where everyone prayed aloud continuously for a long period of time.

institution. Between 1950 and 1960, an advanced training programme was introduced with a focus on leadership and pastoral care appropriate for local and national leadership. By that time, single men and married couples were selected to attend the school (Pollard, 2006: 143; quoting Wilson 1965). For a period of six months in each year from the 1960s to the 1970s, the school offered courses that specifically focused on leadership, evangelism, pastoral courses and other courses that would provide support for the local church.

***Fiku ana Kini* Women's Band (now Women's Fellowship)**

The formation of a women's group was a later development that addressed the women's non-participation in training with their husbands for Christian evangelism and witness. The separation of gender space and roles in the SSEC is not new. As observed by Mrs Sullivan as quoted by Pollard (2006), the basic reason as to why the *Fiku ana kini* (known now as Women's Fellowship) was established at Onepusu Bible School in 1934 was to provide a space for local students' wives to socialise and learn basic home management skills (Pollard, 2006).



Figure 33: Likimaea SSEC local church Women's Fellowship

Source: ©Ben Wate, July 2015.

She further stated that the students' wives could not attend classes with their husbands because of their commitment to the family needs of childcare and other household commitments. As Pollard (2006) has rightly pointed out, this was not purely because of the burden of childcare and other household commitments, but partly due to Malaitan cultural values that women could not be present at men's activities. 'Schooling' was a male domain, which women could not be seen in. This has reflected in the manner in which many families who have experienced financial hardships think about education in contemporary Solomon Islands. Education for boys is a priority and only when families can afford it are girls given opportunities to go to school.

The *Fiku ana kini* was later named 'Women's Band', aligned to the existence of 'Men's Band' which involved women in 'Christian Endeavour', a ministry that encouraged Christian evangelism, personal witness and public testimony.

The Birth of the South Sea Evangelical Church (SSEC)

Based on the evangelical tradition, and practices, which were built by the QKM and the SSEM, an independent island church was born. The Islanders had decided to preserve the historical link with the founding objectives of the mission and also a historical connection with Queensland. In March 1964, at Ambu on Malaita, a conference of SSEM leaders was convened to design and set the future vision for a local church. It was the culmination of strenuous attempts by SSEM missionaries to recover their control of the Mission after *Maasina Rule* (an anti-colonial movement on Malaita) when they completely lost favour on Malaita (see Burt 1994). The Mission had been restructured in the early 1950s, as a means of containing the power exercised by local SSEM leaders during *Maasina Rule* (see Griffiths, 1977: 141, 162-163).

It was during that time that the SSEC was inaugurated. The conference was well attended by leaders, mostly men. In her research, Pollard (2006) has claimed that a number of women leaders had also participated in planning for the newly born island church. However, it was unclear whether the women who actually participated in the conference had the same roles and privileges as the men in discussions and decision making.



Figure 34: Delegates representing Solomon Islands in 1964

Male only delegates representing Solomon Islands at the inaugural Conference of the SSEC at Ambu, near Auki, in 1964. **Source:** Ben Burt, 1994: 207. *Used with permission from the British Museum.*

By inaugurating an island church, the SSEC retained the governing principles of the SSEM; that it would be a “self-governing, self-supporting, and self-propagating church”³⁸ (Griffiths, 1977; Pollard, 2006). In setting the direction and guidance of the SSEC, the expatriate missionaries ensured that it maintained its historical foundations while being grounded in the local context as well.

William Smalley (1981, quoted by Pollard 2006) argues that the governing principles (the three selfs) were not indigenous. The indigenous church refers to a communal lifestyle where people socialised, and transformation eventuated out of the felt needs under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and Scripture. He further rejected the idea of the church being administered from outside, but hoped to see it managed within the local environment

³⁸ The principles originated with Henry Venn, the Church Missionary Society Secretary, and Rufus Anderson, the Secretary of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions in the 1840s. *Used with permission from the British Museum.*

according to local needs (Pollard, 2006:127). Accordingly, Smalley suggested that the indigenous church must be characterised by nine principles. These included the “training of local human resources, a clean break from heathenism, utilisation of local needs, work without remuneration, acceptable dress code, offerings, training, self-sufficiency and discipline” (Pollard, 2006:127). In many ways, following Smalley, the SSEC has continued to emphasise these principles and rules in the church up until today but is confronted by its lack of allegiance to freedom and equality of people, both men and women in the church today. [The problem is that freedom and equality were not part of the nine principles so they can’t really be accused of ‘lack of allegiance’ when they weren’t listed. There is no freedom and equality today because they were not considered to be important when the SSEC was formed.]

Foundational Christian Belief

The foundational Christian belief of the SSEC remains anchored on the founding principles designed by its founder Florence Young. The church emphasises *Sola Scriptura* (Scripture alone) and holds that the Bible is the supreme authority, the inerrant word of God, which holds every truth concerning faith and practice. Florence Young was strongly influenced by the “extreme Protestant view that only practices that are positively sanctioned by the Scripture were acceptable and all else must be rejected” (Moore, 2009: 5). Florence Young was influenced by strict devotion to the Scripture. This was largely through her parents’ association with the Plymouth Open Brethren. The Brethren’s teachings and beliefs were defined by a strict devotion to the Bible and Christian conversion. It rejected close association with the state, as well as a hierarchical church government such as the priestly order in the Anglican Church and the Roman Catholic Church (RCC). It also rejected the emphasis on rituals in worship and focused more on the New Testament (Moore, 2009: 4-5). These practices and teachings can still be found in the SSEC today.

In the SSEC Constitution, the strict allegiance to the Bible is well articulated.

- (1) That the Divine inspiration and supreme authority and sufficiency of the entire Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments is the final instrument to be used in matters of faith and practice (hereafter referred to as “the Holy Scripture”) (2 Timothy. 3:15-17; 2 Peter 1:20; 1 Peter 1:10-12; Ps. 19:7-11) (SSEC Constitution, 2014: 2).

In effect, Holy Scripture remains the supreme authority in matters of the church’s Christian faith. It sets the guidelines and direction for all matters of conduct and belief in the church.

As emphasised, it has the ultimate and final authority for any dilemmas of faith and practice within the SSEC. Further to that the constitution also defines the objectives of the church organisation:

- 1) To provide worship and fellowship for the edification of the members of the church;
 - 2) To witness for the Lord Jesus Christ in Solomon Islands and the World;
 - 3) To plant, establish and care for local churches;
 - 4) To train and equip its members to correctly understand and interpret the Holy Scriptures for personal growth, maturity and effective witness;
- (2) To do all other things as are helpful and are consistent with the Holy Scripture (SSEC Constitution, 2014: 2).

The primary objective of the SSEC is to build a Christian community that witnesses to the lordship of Jesus and to correctly understand and interpret Scripture and practise the things that are consistent with it. This has restricted the conduct of the SSEC. However, while the nature of worship and church life has not been outlined, on the other hand, the primacy of the Scripture and the manifestation of the Holy Spirit and the exercise of spiritual gifts, and freedom in the church are highly emphasised. Nevertheless, the practice of freedom and equality of men and women remains to be seen.

The SSEC Approach to Cultural Tradition

Drawn from its missionary policy, the church opposed many local cultural traditions. For instance, there has been a ban on bride price and participation in feasting ceremonies for setting up headstones for deceased relatives as commonly practised in Solomon Islands. Other rituals such as first harvest and initiation were also banned. Strict codes of behaviour for its members included forbidding the chewing of betel nut, alcohol consumption and smoking tobacco (Ernst, 1994; Fangalea, 2006). These social practices are perceived by church authorities as marks of the traditional life of past generations. Every SSEC member is expected to show allegiance by following church rules. For the SSEC, baptism marks a crucial stage in life to renounce the old ways of life and show a 'clean break' from the traditional past.

However, the missionary expectation for a 'clean-break' from cultural traditions has not always been taken seriously by Malaitan SSEC Christians. Ben Burt (1994), writing about tradition and Christianity, and the colonial transformation in Solomon Islands, particularly in Kwaraa'e on Malaita, pointed that of the many church denominations that entered

Malaita, the SSEC significantly identified as a “Malaitan Church”. This has implied that the SSEC has not set itself to a complete break from local culture and traditional religion (of Malaita). In fact, the SSEC retains many of the insights of traditional religion, which gives [the] SSEC its vitality” (Burt, 1994: 13). One of the prominent challenges involves bride price, which the church has not yet resolved, even though it had been tackled by the early expatriate missionaries since 1912. The church, and in particular the expatriate missionaries, taught that bride price (Pollard, 2000; Bre, 2006; Macintyre, 2012; Zimmer-Tamakoshi, 2012: 73-105) undermines the creation plan of God for a man and a woman to marry freely without any burden of costs. While the SSEC has adopted the belief that men and women should marry freely without bride price, the attempts to regulate it has faced a major challenge mostly by the local Malaitan culture. Malaitans believe that a woman’s worth and value means that she cannot leave her natal family without some equitable value of worth being given in exchange. When bride price was banned by the SSEM in 1912, North Malaita Christians protested against the ban. The issue of bride price has not been resolved, and there has been a tendency in the contemporary SSEC to modify the bride price ceremony to assuage the church’s concerns.³⁹

Formation of SSEC: SSEC Regions, Associations and Zones

The SSEC is comprised of six regions. They are, firstly, Makira, Rennell and Bellona, Guadalcanal, and Central island regions. Honiara city, including Choiseul, Western, and Central provinces belong to one region. Malaita has the highest population of SSEC adherents, and it is divided into two regions, North Malaita, and South Malaita, which includes Small Malaita. Other islands (for example, Isabel and Temotu), with small SSEC followers, are included in the HCWC region. The church has a total of 34 Associations and 600 local church congregations.

³⁹ For further discussion regarding the complication of bride price in the SSEC, see Pollard, 2000.

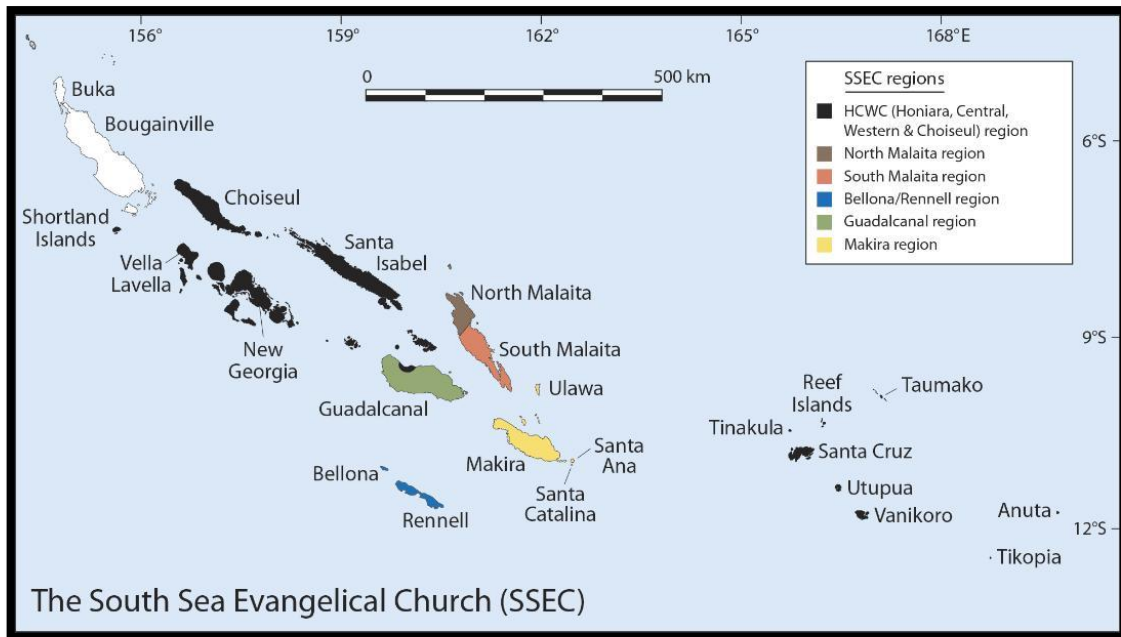


Figure 35: SSEC Zones in The South Sea Evangelical Church, Solomon Islands

Source: ©Les O’Neil, Department of Anthropology & Archaeology, University of Otago, 2018.

Governance Structure of SSEC

The church is governed by a well-defined bureaucratic structure that is largely controlled by a patriarchal leadership.



Figure 36: SSEC Organisation structure

Source: The South Sea Evangelical Church, Constitution, revised edition 2011. *Used with permission from the South Sea Evangelical Church, Honiara, Solomon Islands.*

Although the SSEC has adopted a congregational-based model of governance (Ernst, 1994), its leadership is bureaucratic. In the congregational model, decisions are usually made largely by the congregation, where the congregational influence is high in decision-making. However, a close observation of the SSEC revised Constitution, 2011, shows that the power to legislate is vested within certain senior levels of the hierarchy of the church.

Three significant tiers of authority are provided for in the constitution. By the authority of the constitution, they are vested with powers to make decisions that affect the whole church. At the top of the organisational structure is the General Conference. It is the highest legislative body of the whole church. It is vested with autonomous power to regulate the overall running of the church and the appointment of its national leaders, legislate on spiritual matters, and deal with issues affecting the church. Below is the National Executive Board (NEB). Its primary role is to act on directives delegated to it by the General

Conference, and it is convened to deliberate on matters that the General Conference cannot deal with due to shortage of time and financial resources. On the other side is the National Eldership Board (NEB). It consists of the Reverend Bishop, the Vice-Bishop, the General Secretary and a number of retired bishops and ordained ministers of the church. Among other important responsibilities, the NEB is charged with the overall responsibility to oversee the spiritual matters of the church and provides advice to the General Conference. It regulates the appointments of regional ministers and behaviour of ordained ministers. The membership of the board is exclusively male because no woman has yet been ordained as a reverend minister.

Below the national level are four tiers of authority: the region, association, zone, and the local church. These authorities operate within their respective jurisdictions, yet they function under the top leadership authorities of the church. In many circumstances, decisions as to what needs to be done have to come from the authorities above. Church bodies such as boards, commissions, and committees exist to support the mission of the church. This covers the areas of church doctrines and theology, ministry, education and training, salaries and service, constitution reviews, disaster relief, women's ministry, and youth ministry.

As in other evangelical churches, SSEC church leaders are not permanently ordained to leadership positions. Comparatively, in the institutional model structure, mostly practised by the Anglican and Roman Catholic churches, the incumbents of the three-fold ministry such as bishop, priest or deacon, become permanent holders of the positions after they are ordained. However, the SSEC leaders hold leadership positions for a designated period and will relinquish their leadership titles when their terms lapse.

Nevertheless, in essence, the SSEC structure is bureaucratic and hierarchical. The constitution plays an important role in providing guidelines to the church. It outlines the fundamental church doctrines, the mission functions of the church and its leadership structure and administration. The historical legacy and the contemporary formation of the church reflects its origins in Queensland, Australia.

The Formal Leadership Structure

The formal leadership structure of the SSEC reflects the different tiers of the church. I use the term ‘formal leadership’ to refer to the positions regulated by the constitution. Other leadership positions can be found at the lower levels within the church that are not stipulated in the constitution.

The church is hierarchical in its leadership structure. The Reverend Bishop is the spiritual head of the church and oversees spiritual welfare and governance. He oversees other important church bodies and committees including the General Conference. The Vice-Bishop is the immediate subordinate of the Reverend Bishop, and mainly oversees the mission and ministry of the whole church. These top leadership positions are regulated by the church constitution and their elections are held via a secret ballot at the General Conference, the highest decision making body of the church (SSEC Constitution, 2014: 5). The church has six regions, and within each region, various units of leadership are established. These include the church association, zone, and a local church congregation. The regional superintendent minister oversees the church work in the whole region, supported by the senior reverend minister who heads the association. The senior pastor heads the zone, while a village pastor who is elected oversees the local church congregation.

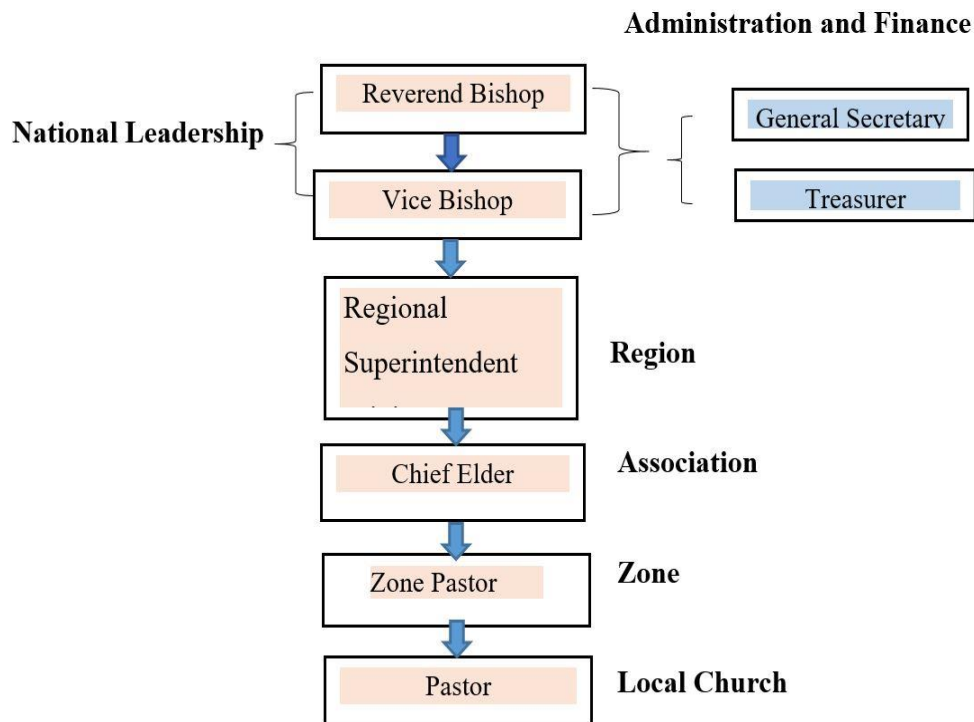


Figure 37: Leadership tiers and positions

In charge of the general administration of the church’s national head office, is the general secretary. The church accounts and finance are under the control of the treasurer. Both offices are directly under the jurisdiction of the Reverend Bishop. As regulated in the constitution, the Reverend Bishop is mandated to appoint the holders of the positions in consultation with the General Conference. However, it has been a normal practice in Solomon Islands for senior leader’s preferences to be easily accepted without further questioning. Church members have a lot of respect for their senior church leaders.

Leadership positions are predominantly filled by men. Although women have assumed some leadership roles in their respective local church congregations, they are not permitted to perform certain roles that men perform. For example, a female elder, Catherine Keni, noted that she was not even permitted to formally welcome the congregation attending the church services on Sundays, unlike her male colleagues who hold similar position to her in the church (personal conversation, 1 October 2015).

The History of the Anglican Church of Melanesia

The SSEC was not alone in evangelising Solomon Islands and establishing a local church. During the 19th, 20th and 21st centuries, it has worked in the islands during the same period where the Melanesian Mission and the ACOM had conducted its evangelism work. The Melanesian Mission, which later became the ACOM was initially a special mission for Melanesians, founded in 1849 by George Augustus Selwyn, the first bishop of the Church of England in New Zealand (Fox, 1958; Whiteman, 1983; Davidson, 2000). Selwyn's plan was to bring young men from the islands of Melanesia to educate them in New Zealand, and later under Bishop Patteson's leadership, to Norfolk Island, and then return them to their own islands to evangelise their own people (Fox, 1958; Davidson, 2000). The students were trained purposely, so that they could model churchmanship and Christian leadership in their respective local village communities. Young girls were recruited alongside the young men as their future wives. The training of the girls was centred around their expected role as models of Christian domesticity and future wives, providing a Christian home environment (Hilliard, 1978; see also Choi, 2014; Choi & Jolly, 2014).



Figure 38: Melanesian girls on Norfolk Island learning to sew

Source: Photo by John W. Beattie 227, (1896). *Used with permission from the Anglican Church of Melanesia, Honiara, Solomon Islands.*

Indeed, the Melanesian Mission's founding principles, the mission structure and strategy largely represented the philosophy of the 'well-established English-educated clergymen,' reflecting the role of the church and its theology. Of the 39 missionary staff in the Melanesian Mission beginning from the early 1860s, more than half were graduates of Oxford and Cambridge Universities (Hilliard, 1980). In effect, their views of the church were influenced by advanced theological and academic learning.⁴⁰ For them, the church was highly institutional. The founder's academic background and personalities had a larger bearing in directing the Mission's approach and its activities (White, 1983: 99).

⁴⁰ See Langmore, 1989, for a comparison of Catholics and Anglican Missionaries' liberal attitudes towards tradition, shaped by their higher education background and middle-class positions, as opposed to LMS and Wesleyan missionaries.

George Augustus Selwyn

The Melanesian Mission was initially established by Bishop George Augustus Selwyn, and it reflected his view of Christianity and his understanding of its international role. Selwyn was a product of the established church in England, a “privileged education system and conscious class structure” (Davidson, 1993:8). He studied at Eton and St John’s College, Cambridge, and was a distinguished academic and sportsman.

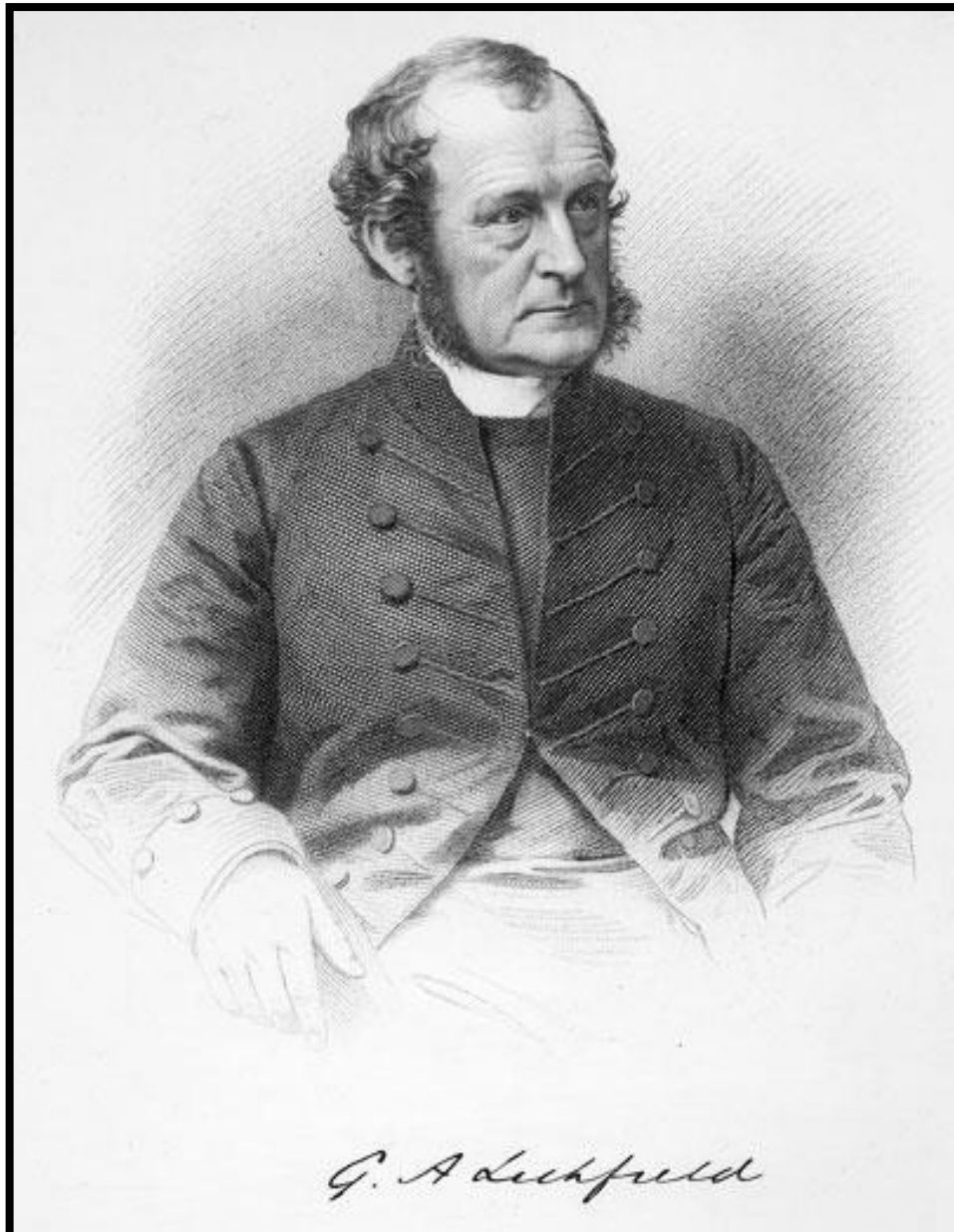


Figure 39: Founder of the Melanesian Mission, Bishop George Augustus Selwyn

Source: John Kinder Library. The Melanesian Mission. Used with permission from the Anglican Church of Melanesia, Honiara, Solomon Islands.

Selwyn rose to episcopal leadership in the nineteenth century during a very trying time of transition and development within the Church of England when it was coming under the influence of the Oxford Movement. The Movement had “confronted the people with the questions about the relationship between the church and state, the apostolic nature of the church and the role of the bishop” (Morrell, 1973; Davidson, 2000:21-22). Consequently, one part of the church had a growing sense of being ‘Anglo-Catholic’. Traditionally since the reformation, the Church of England had positioned itself in the ‘middle ground.’ The church maintained the Catholic tradition of sacraments, the continuity of the apostolic succession, and the hierarchy of the three-fold ministry without allegiance to Rome. Given this position, the “Oxford Movement attempted to position the post-reformation church based on Richard Hooker’s triadic principle of the Scriptures, traditions, and reason” (Zaku, 2013: 52). In many ways, it was an attempt to bridge the gap between the Roman Catholic and Protestant positions.

Although the church had been regarded as a High Church, there had been strong presence of both Anglo Catholic and Evangelical Anglicans who struggled to establish their traditions in the Church of England. The situation eventually led the church to include both Anglo- Catholic and Evangelical strands in the liturgical and theological tradition of the Church of England. Its relationship with the state grew stronger after the Reformation and gradually received mutual support. The church had become an agent of change in education in the nineteenth century through both its Evangelical and High Church groups. “It had the privilege to enforce religious curriculum and it was duty bound to provide social cohesion through perpetuating moral livings and works of benevolence or charity” (Zaku, 2013:55, quoting Norman, 1974:15). As Zaku (2013) has pointed out, the church had an inevitable obligation to the state. That was to expand Christianity and civilisation which for those with a High Church background eventually led towards the vision of “redemption of the whole man” (Fox, 1958: 2). Through its affiliation with the state, the church received political support that later gave way for the church to become a legal entity empowered by the government (Zaku, 2013). Given this position, the church had the capacity to enhance state duty to provide education and perpetuate a moral upbringing that reproduced the Victorian culture. The influence of the Oxford Movement on the Melanesian Mission through Selwyn distinguished it from the Evangelical missionary movements in New Zealand such as the Church Missionary Society (CMS). Selwyn’s view of the Church had led evangelical clergymen to be suspicious of him as making a “move towards Rome” (Davidson,

1993:10). Although Selwyn did not affirm the Roman Catholic Church, he had embraced some its fundamental beliefs on the social role of the church in the world.

The indirect influence of Rome in Selwyn's interpretation of Anglicanism affected plans for conversion particularly as they related to indigenous customary life. One of his evangelising rules was "not to interfere with the Melanesian customs and the ways of life, nor try to make the Melanesians observe English customs and ways of life" (Fox, 1958:6). However, Selwyn was a man of principle and he emphasised his intention of implanting the high Anglicanism in Melanesia, clothing it in Melanesian forms (Fox, 1958:6). With this principle, the Melanesian Mission could seek to identify itself as a Melanesian Catholic-Christianity, rooted in the Melanesian traditions with cultural forms of expression. While the Melanesians appreciated the mission policy of 'non-interference' in the indigenous culture, the Mission's governance structure and administration, together with the pastoral and theological frame of mind and practice resembled that of the Church of England. Indeed, the colonial assumptions of the Church of England reappear through the structure of the liturgical services, the language, ritual of worship, clothing, and seating arrangements (cf. Winduo, 2000; Kabutaulaka, 2015). In essence, Victorian gender relations, and more specifically the roles of women in society, remain as legacies of the English church in Melanesia.

John Coleridge Patteson

Another early leading figure of the Melanesian Mission was Bishop John Coleridge Patteson. Patteson was the son of a British high court judge, from an aristocratic family background. He was a graduate of Eton College, and Oxford University. Like Selwyn, Patteson was intellectually able with considerable linguistic skills. He was ordained in 1853 and served in the COE for two years before he voluntarily accompanied Bishop Selwyn to work in Melanesia in 1855. Patteson was deeply moved by Bishop Selwyn's preaching and appeal for an English clergyman to assist him in his work in Melanesia when Selwyn visited England in 1854 (Fox, 1958:12). Patteson worked under Bishop Selwyn's episcopal leadership in Melanesia, and over a period of six years gradually assumed the leadership over the Mission as a priest. Selwyn's trust in Patteson to take over the leadership of the Mission was evident in his consecration as the first Bishop of Melanesia, at St Paul's Church, Auckland in 1861 (Fox, 1958).

Although, Patteson had often conformed to Selwyn's philosophies of the church, articulating a strong notion of an established church, Patteson reformed the missionary framework after he took over from Selwyn (Gutch, 1971). Patteson was challenged by the question of how Western Christianity would be presented to non-literate and non-Western societies in Melanesia (Hilliard, 1978:54). Initially he was distressed by and unsympathetic towards Melanesian religious beliefs and ritual practices, viewing them as superstitions without theological justification.

A drastic shift in Patterson's intellectual reflections on Christianity led to a more relativist and inclusive view of Christianity. From 1861, the Melanesian Mission had become a missionary diocese of Melanesia under the leadership of Patteson. Patteson theorised a Christianity that was universal, but socially aligned and assimilated to respond to the social needs and contexts of society. This universal and relativist perception of Christianity has influenced the Melanesian Mission's work to this day. He distinguished between the principal beliefs of the church. The fundamental doctrines of the church remained unchangeable while on the other hand, some principles could be rationally modified in response to the circumstances of the time. Patteson, confessed:

I have for years thought that we seek in our Missions a great deal too much to make *English* Christians of our converts. We consciously and unanimously assume English Christianity (as something distinct I mean from the doctrine of the Church of England), to be necessary; much as so many people assume the relation of Church and State in England to be a typical and normal condition of the Church ...Evidently the heathen man is not treated fairly if we encumber our message with unnecessary requirements (Hilliard, 1978:56)

Patterson's relativist theory of an 'accommodation Christianity' was relatively juxtaposed with Selwyn's theological framework of the 'redemption of the whole man' and provided the theological and missiological groundwork for the evangelisation of Melanesian people. Patteson's 'accommodation missiology' is universal and all-embracing providing the base for a wider, non-racial, and inclusive mission structure that caters for Melanesians. His missiological philosophy embraced Selwyn's theological framework and prioritised the holistic evangelisation and development of the 'whole man'.

Missiological foundation of the Melanesian Mission

The Melanesian Mission, as a product of an established church, stands in contrast to evangelical Christianity in the Pacific. The evangelical missions, such as the London

Missionary Society (LMS), were both congregational in their polity and evangelical in their theology. In essence they rejected the hierarchical governance structure which is most clearly pronounced in the RCC. By being a product of an established church, the Melanesian Mission sought to establish itself more outwardly as a church that represented the distinctive nature of the governance structure of the English Church, and the intellectual tradition it represented. This appeared on a number of fronts.

Firstly, the Melanesian Mission reflected the established Church from which it originated, resembling the Church of England with its High Church tradition and its English cultural influences. The Mission adopted and preserved the church government structure of bishops, priest and deacons, and the acceptance of two major sacraments – baptism and Eucharist – believed to be ordained by Christ, and five other sacraments – confirmation, orders, matrimony, penance, and extreme unction – instituted by the church. The Melanesian Mission sought to maintain the ‘Apostolic succession’, that the authority of the formal leadership of the church, the three-fold ministry, is unbroken but had been successively passed on from the apostolic times. The Melanesian Mission has therefore, adopted a form of leadership which is more hierarchical than some of the evangelical missions, reinforcing the tradition of male domination in its ministry.

Secondly, the Melanesian Mission was founded on the triadic principles of Scripture, tradition, and reason. This means that all matters of faith and doctrine, church laws and policies, ought to be considered hermeneutically and broadly against the background of the Scripture, traditions and practices of the church, but ensuring that they were intellectually sound. Unlike evangelical Christianity where the Bible is perceived literally as the ultimate word of God, which has an absolute authority in all matters of faith, the triadic formulae does not give primacy to the Scripture, although the Bible is sacred and perceived as the word of God. Instead, the need for broad human intellectual reasoning is considered necessary and important in the interpretation and understanding of the word of God (cf. McDougall & Tomlinson, 2013). This legacy was adopted in the Mission and continues to be formative for the ACOM. This demonstrates a clear example of the influence of the intellectual tradition of the pioneers on the shaping of the church through to the present.

Thirdly, Selwyn’s principle of “redemption of the whole man” (Fox, 1958:2) supported by Patteson’s missiological principle of ‘accommodation Christianity’ (Hilliard, 1978) set out

a firm foundation for its Christian belief and evangelical work that was holistic in nature. This principle has continued, irrespective of episcopal leadership, throughout the course of Melanesian Mission history, and consequently shapes the contemporary missiological thinking and function of the ACOM.

The notion of “redemption of the whole man” (Fox, 1958:2) goes to the core of Selwyn and Patteson’s views about the role of Christianity and the state. The church was seen as a redeeming agency, not only for the soul, but for the mind and the body as well (Fox, 1958). Selwyn had clearly underscored his philosophical principle in the form of a prayer, attesting “that true religion, sound learning, and useful industry may forever flourish and abound” (Fox, 1958:2) in the new mission field. This provided a guide to the mission aspirations of St John’s College in Auckland, which Selwyn founded for the training of Pacific missionaries.

For the Melanesians, Selwyn had invoked the Biblical imagery of a man possessed by an evil spirit, being cast out and “sitting at the feet of Jesus, and being clothed in his right mind” (Fox, 1958:2). Clothed in his right mind, refers to the mission process of Melanesians being free to attain, “good health, better homes, and better farms; and [being] in their right mind, [by means of] better education” (Fox, 1958:2). This Biblical imagery clearly translates the Melanesian Mission’s holistic strategy of evangelisation. This holistic approach largely shaped the ACOM vision and mission role. The church has seen its roles as an agency, not only for spiritual transformation, but for socio-economic, and political transformation for the whole human being and community.

Fourthly, the relativist principle of non-interference in Melanesian culture provided an accessible pathway for acceptance in the missionary church enabling important aspects of the local culture to remain intact. It was unnecessary to “denationalise” or assume the pre-eminence of English civilisation and culture (Hilliard, 1978:56). For Patteson, “only a simple change of customs and behaviour that were incompatible with the basic Christian teaching and practices, could be encouraged” (Hilliard, 1978:56). This relativist approach provided a firm ground for the Melanesian Mission, and later the ACOM to nurture cultural tolerance (cf. Cox, 2017:83). In essence, this relativist ideology supported traditional gender relations, and the strict partitioning of women from men in society.

Consequently, these principles have set out the framework through which the ACOM theorised its mission work and influenced the manner in which it approaches men's and women's roles in the church. In turn it encourages the church's missiological thinking to be holistic and its mission engagement activities to become inclusive. However, while there seems to be a rising new consciousness and interpretative review of the roles of women at the top level of the church, there has not been any review of women's roles at the rural village level.

An overview of the Melanesian Mission perspective on the roles of women in rural Christian society, and their approach to the training of women is necessary to unpack the rationale that foregrounded the missionary approach to education.

The Melanesian Mission Approach to Women's Education

The primary missionary objective for educating women was to transform women's social condition and to offer alternative relevant Anglo-Christian knowledge and skills compatible with the dawning of the colonial and Christian eras. This was embedded with the primary objective of providing women with relevant skills and knowledge for the management of the new Anglo-Christian model of 'home' and womanhood (cf. Choi & Jolly, 2014; for the case of Vanuatu, see Douglas, 2003; Pollard, 2006). Subjects such as simple English, reading and writing, and arithmetic were introduced. These subjects were also necessary tools to enable communication with the missionary teachers and to assist women in the introduced skills of sewing and cooking. Fundamentally, in the first instance, the mission policy on women's education focused primarily on local Christian teachers' wives. The training was focused on the young women, pre-arranged to marry young men who were recruited to be trained as Christian teachers in the islands (Armstrong, 1900; Hilliard, 1978). Later the training opened to young girls and women with the focus on home-based skills necessary to manage local homes. The missionary training of women was done in a number of ways.

Enabling local Christian teachers' wives

The training of young women began in Auckland under the leadership of Sarah Selwyn and Lady Mary Martin (Crawford, 2000). Later the training shifted on Norfolk Island, initially under the supervision of Mrs Elizabeth Colenso. The number was usually small. By the 1890s 40 women were enrolled at Norfolk Island (Hilliard, 1978: 149). In Melanesia, young

girls are not normally allowed to be away from their mothers until they are married. However, the recruitment and training of unmarried women on Norfolk Island was done so that the trained women would become competent wives for the Christian leaders in Solomon Islands. The young women that were recruited and trained were already engaged to marry the young men who had also been recruited (Armstrong, 1900) for training. The entire training scheme of women was focused on promoting a new Anglo-Christian household environment. Armstrong describes the training on Norfolk Island:

Besides religious education, they were taught all household duties and to cut-out and make clothes, some of them learning to sew very neatly. In every house at St Barnabas there is a large 'girl's room', bright and sunshiny, with tables and chairs; and in summer, when the weather is hot, the books are taken to the broad veranda where the schooling is carried on... The amount of sewing needed may be gathered by the fact that in one year 220 shirts, 620 trousers, besides flannels were made (Armstrong, 1900:336-337).

The content of the training that the local women received had little relevance to the realities of the daily women's roles in the islands that centred on childcare and gardening (Hilliard, 1978:150). However, the training programme had to be unique and standardised in order to introduce the local women to the status they would occupy, and the new roles expected as wives of local Christian leaders. On Norfolk Island, while their training covered subjects such as learning to read the Scripture, prayers and other spiritual subjects, much of the syllabus focused on the formal Anglo-Christian domestic setting, and household manners. This included sewing and the domestic arts of cooking, washing, starching and ironing. As prospective Christian teacher's wives, they had to ensure that they learned sewing so that they could make sacred garments and church clothes for their husbands, children and members of the community for church use. During their time on Norfolk Island, these Melanesian young women sewed about 1,600 garments per annum to cater for the 160 Melanesian students, including themselves (Hilliard, 1978; 150).

Women were encouraged to practise what they had learned. For instance, Mr Bice, one of the Melanesian Mission staff who worked in the Banks group in the New Hebrides (Vanuatu) in the early 1900s, reported to Mrs Colenso, that George Sarawia's wife, one of the former Norfolk Island students from Motalava, who accompanied her husband, made her own starch out of arrow root. She was found serving afternoon tea promptly at four o'clock. She offered typical European home entertainment, ensuring that there was white linen to cover wooden tables (Hilliard, 1978).

Christian women

Although the initial focus of the Melanesian Mission was on the education of the prospective local teachers' wives, from the early 1900s there was a shift to include the education of local village women. Generally, the position of women in the local society depressed many foreign missionaries (see Jolly & Macintyre, 1989; Douglas, 2003). There was a feeling that women were degraded in their own local society (Hilliard, 1978:150). However, raising the dignity of women was not centred on offering women academic forms of education, but rather equipping them with new forms of Anglo-Christian domesticity, skills and knowledge. But as Tracey Banivanua-Mar (2016: ix) puts it, "local women were taught how to mother, how to think, and behave like civilised [Christian] women". The focus was on introducing European customs of table manners, and life skills suitable for the new Anglo-Christian model of the home environment. It was a way of imposing English Christian ideals about womanhood (see Jolly & Macintyre, 1989; Bolton, 2015:).

A Women's Station in Solomon Islands was established at Ngella in 1909, and later at Maravovo in 1913. This establishment was introduced as a base for educating local women in English social life skills and home management. As on Norfolk Island, subjects such as sewing, cooking, ironing, home furniture setting, and table manners were woven through with the teaching of Scripture reading, prayer and meditations. Local women were also introduced to moral teaching, cleanliness, and personal hygiene, developing a respectable character and good manners (Hilliard, 1978:151). This women's training opened an avenue for women to socialise with young women from other islands, and to learn how to communicate with female expatriate missionary teachers. Unlike the Norfolk Island based school, the Women's Station acted as a powerhouse to equip women to participate fully in the new and dawning Christian community.

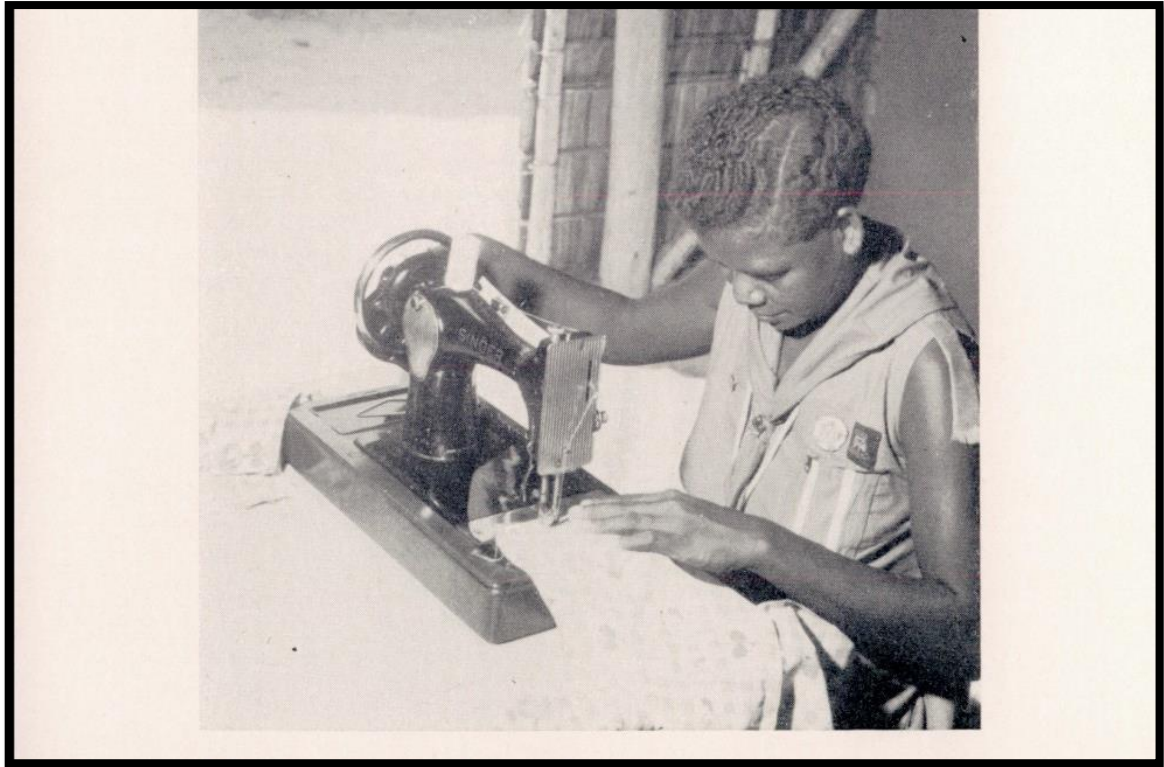


Figure 40: A female student using a sewing machine at St Hilda Bungana, Ngella, Solomon Islands

Sources: The Southern Cross Log: Issue 87, December 1964. *Used with permission from the Anglican Church of Melanesia, Honiara, Solomon Islands.*

The Women's Station extended its training to nearby villages and continued to provide necessary skills, such as sewing to help village women clothe their families. Unlike the SSEM, where the training of women was heavily focused on personal spiritual formation and evangelism, encouraging women to do personal evangelism and outreach, the Melanesian Mission equipped the women with knowledge of the Bible and the prayer book. The Bible and the prayer book remain the symbolic presence of Anglican Christianity given to women for the purpose of imparting Christian knowledge, rather than strict Christian conviction.

To enable the local Christian women, both the clergy wives and ordinary Christian women, to focus on the missionary programme of the Christian family and Christian womanhood, the introduction of the Mothers' Union in the 1920s empowered local women, both socially and spiritually.

The Mothers' Union

The formation of the Mothers' Union in Melanesia, particularly in Solomon Islands in the 1920s, focused on Christian family life (Paterson, 2000). It was to transform the traditional model of family life and to realign local women's roles within the Christian framework of family. Furthermore, it was to equip the Christian women with skills that enhance Christian family life, and to instil a civilised Anglo-Christian mind-set about home economics and hygiene. The Mothers' Union was characterised by the image of Mary as the mother of Jesus. In a way, the imagination of Mary draws on the symbolic character of Christian motherhood and civilisation. Mary is well inscribed with Christian values of love, humility, and embracing care. This socio-spiritual imagination has had a significant influence on the contemporary ACOM Mothers' Union work.



Figure 41: Joint fellowship of Walande and Sa'a parish Mothers' Union groups

Source: ©Ben Wate, 2014.

The Mothers' Union was founded in England in 1876 by Mary Sumner, wife of George Sumner, a rector in the village of Old Alresford in Hampshire, a parish in England (Mothers' Union, *Handbook*, 2009). Mrs Sumner's aim was to arouse the ability of parents, a sense of responsibility to raise children up in the Christian faith. She had encouraged English mothers not to allow their children to be fully taken care of by babysitters but to give them enough time to teach them good manners and basic Christian doctrine (Manemala, 1990). The Mothers' Union was formed at a time when England was in the

grip of a recession. Men, women and children were highly exploited and there was a large divide between rich and poor (Manemala, 1990).

In Solomon Islands, the Mothers' Union was first introduced in 1919 by Mrs Emily Sprott, a female member of staff of the Melanesian Mission. She started working with 16 local women from Ysabel, but they were not admitted to the Mothers' Union until 1924. On Malaita, the Mothers' Union was started at *Fiu* in 1923 by Gwendoline Mason, wife of a missionary priest who worked there in the earlier 1900s (Mothers' Union, *Handbook*, 2009). In the 1960s, the Mothers' Union began to be introduced to every Anglican village and was quickly recognised both by Church and local community leaders because of its supportive roles for the local communities and families. It provided caring roles for the sick, older people and people with special needs. Not only that but its enabling roles in teaching children Christian values and behaviour in a way consolidated community life and social stability.

According to the Provincial Mother's Union report in 2014, a membership of 16,000 women was recorded with over 300 members in the two dioceses in Vanuatu, while there were 15,700 Mothers' Union members in Solomon Islands. The number continues to increase each year as more young women marry and join the organisation. Local young women find the Mother's Union programmes useful in introducing them to new roles of Christian motherhood which emphasise Christian values.

Mothers' Union Aims and Objectives

The Mothers' Union is guided by five principal objectives.

1. To uphold Christ's teaching on the nature of marriage and promote its wider understanding.
2. To encourage parents to bring up children in the faith and life of the Church;
3. To maintain a worldwide fellowship of Christians united in prayer, worship and service.
4. To promote conditions in society favourable to stable family life and the protection of children.
5. To help those whose family life has met with adversity (hardship, trouble, disaster) (Mothers Union, *Handbook*, 2009:6).

The objectives clearly set the parameters whereby the Mothers' Union operates its mission and activities.

Constitution and Structure

The Mothers' Union is an established women's organisation. It has a constitution that regulates its functions and outlines the processes to follow when a woman wants to join, making the organisation a closed group. It has a structure that provides information concerning different functions and levels of leadership within the organisation. Similar to the church structure, the Mothers' Union is quite bureaucratic, and its structure and network are extended from the top level to the dioceses, parishes and villages.

In many Anglican communities, women, especially the married ones, were encouraged to join. Many young women, both educated and uneducated, found the Mothers' Union to be an empowering platform to ease boredom, and allow women to socially connect with other women where they could share their burdens and exchange ideas (see Scheyvens, 2003).

The dynamic status of the Mothers' Union is focused on Christian family life and as a result, the Mothers Union targets the core of the socio-Christian fabric of society. It contributes to consolidating community life by ensuring stronger Christian marriage and Christian life. Children are taught Christian values of respect and obedience, which are compatible with the social and cultural norms and values of family and village life.

The preceding discussion of the history of the formation of the Melanesian Mission and its underlying principles are significant for the understanding of contemporary gender relations in the ACOM.

The Anglican Church of Melanesia

The Missionary Diocese of Melanesia remained as a diocese with the Anglican Province of New Zealand until 1975 when it became an autonomous province. At the time of independence, the Province of Melanesia had three dioceses with an expatriate Archbishop and three local bishops from Malaita, Ysabel and Vanuatu. Over the years, the church has grown into a total of nine dioceses: seven in Solomon Islands, and two in the Republic of Vanuatu which also extends to the French territory of New Caledonia.

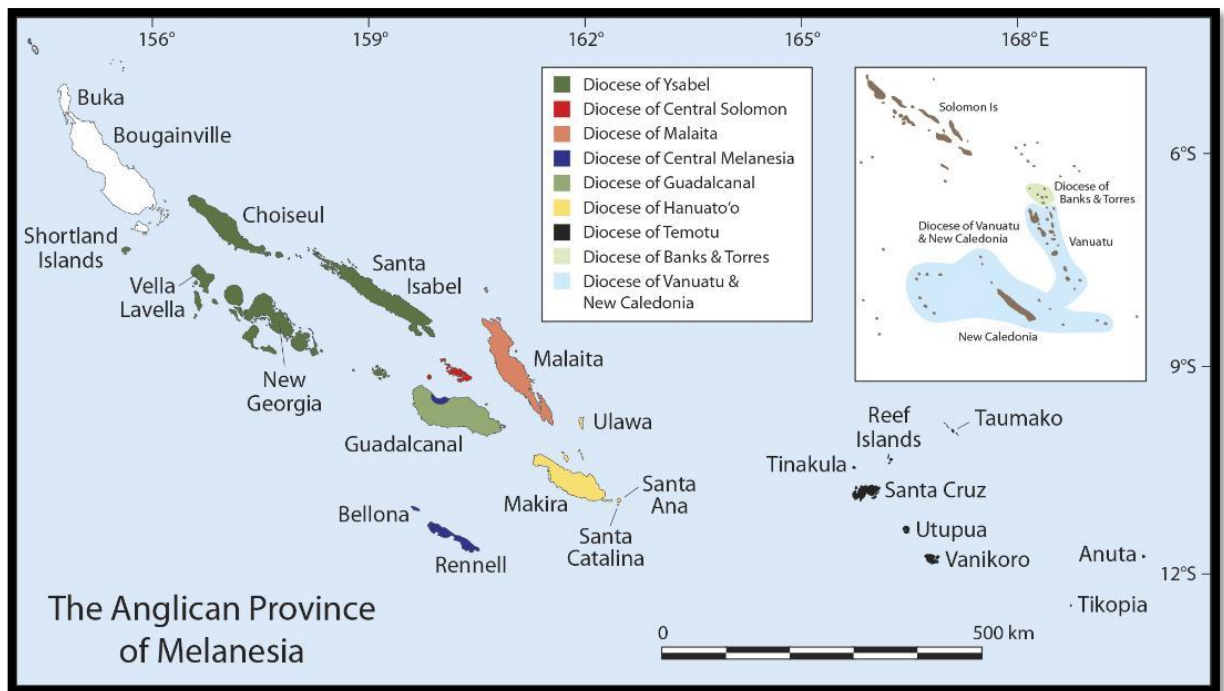


Figure 42: Anglican Church of Melanesia

Source: ©Les O’Neill, Department of Anthropology & Archaeology, University of Otago, 2018.

Foundation of Faith

Like the Catholic Church, the fundamental beliefs of the ACOM are grounded on the primacy of the teaching and the sacraments of the church (with emphasis on the authority of the apostolic church). While the foundation of faith emphasises its acceptance of the teachings of Jesus Christ, and recognises the Holy Scripture as containing the necessary instruction, its faith is deeply anchored in the sacraments and the Holy Catholic and Apostolic faith. This means the church has accepted an administration shaped by the pastoral and liturgical roles of bishops, priests and deacons, and their respective sacramental roles. The sacramental functions include the administration of baptism, Holy Communion, confession, confirmation, anointing of the sick, ordination, and marriage. With the authority of the three-fold ministry, which is *ipso factor* (exclusively male), male have the overall authority in the church.

Furthermore, the ACOM’s faith is characterised in terms of ‘word’ and ‘social action’. While the church literally preaches the gospel, it considers appropriate responses to social needs and problems as the basis of its mission. This has resonated well with the founding principles of the ‘accommodation missiology’ pursued by Bishop Patteson and the

“redemption of the whole man” of Bishop Selwyn. The influence of these founding missiological principles has a deeper resonance in the ACOM’s Mission statement.

Our purpose is to be a faithful part of Christ’s Body through exercising our baptismal ministries of spreading the Good News of God’s Love in Jesus Christ, being like Christ in thought, word and action, worshipping God in spirit and in truth; using wisely and taking good care of the natural resources and environment as well as all things entrusted to us for the extension of God’s kingdom in the world and demonstrating God’s love in responding to human needs in loving service (ACOM, General Synod paper, 2002).

Governance Structure

The ACOM governance structure inherited a three-tier governing structure which reflects the tradition of the Anglican Communion world-wide (see Hauriasi, 2011). However, in some circumstances, each Anglican province is at liberty to extend its governance tiers, depending on the needs at hand. In the Anglican province of Melanesia, there is variation, but in most cases, the structure has five tiers of governance from the provincial to the village level. At the top is the province. The province is further split into dioceses, regions, parishes or districts, and villages. Urban dioceses and smaller ones do not have a regional organisation.

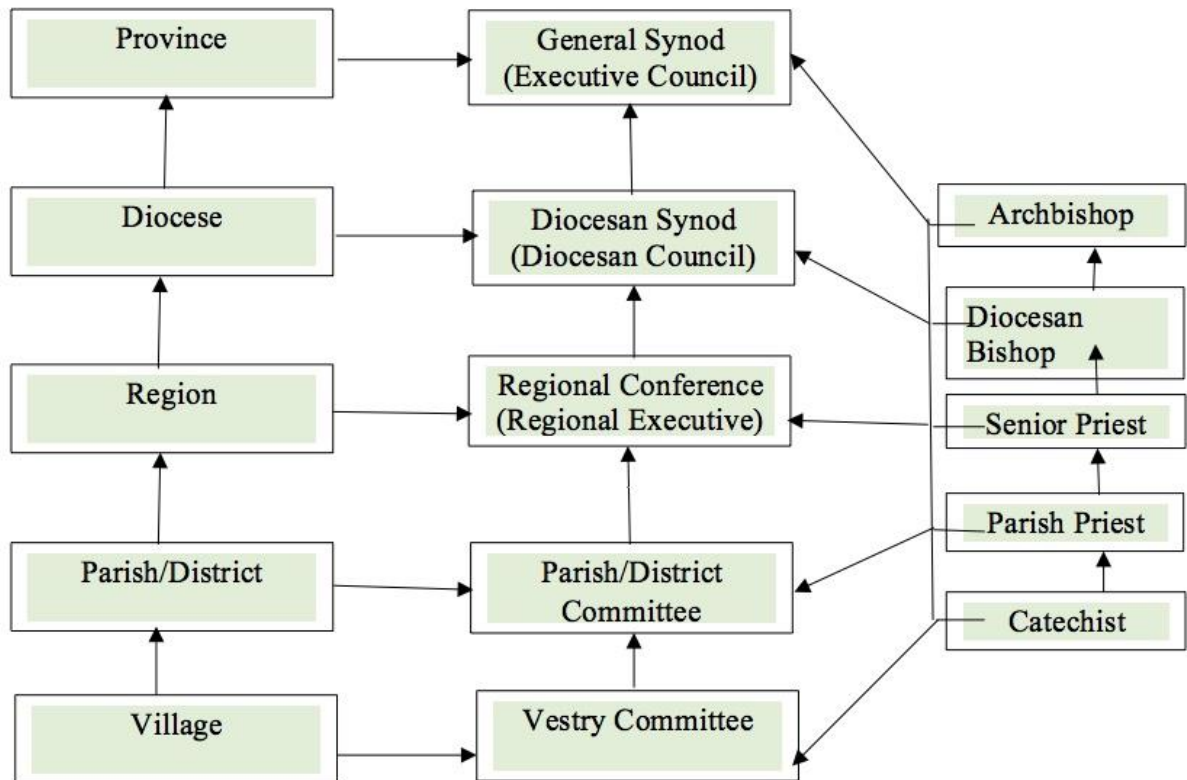


Figure 43: Tiers of Governance⁴¹

Source: ©Ben Wate, 2016.

All the tiers of governance bodies are mandated constitutionally to regulate the overall functions of the ACOM organisation. For instance, the General Synod has constitutional powers to regulate guidelines and decisions that affect the whole province. However, any review of the canons and constitutions cannot be enforced or implemented without the assent of all the dioceses. In effect, any one diocese has a ‘veto power’ to disqualify a General Synod decision by voting against or in support of a motion. The Diocesan Synod is the highest decision-making body of the whole diocese which the diocesan bishop and the clergy report to. In larger dioceses, a regional organisation is necessary to play a subordinate role, managing governance and providing pastoral care at a regional level. The senior priest is appointed by the diocesan bishop to govern a particular region and manages

⁴¹ The arrows show each level of authority, from the archbishop to parish priest. For example, the archbishop chairs the General Synod, at the provincial levels, while the diocesan bishop chairs the diocesan synod at the diocesan level. It shows where their levels of authority operate.

its mission and chairs the regional conference. A parish is composed of Anglican villages under the supervision of the parish priest who manage it with the assistance of the parish committee, which is the governing body that regulates its operation. Each village has a vestry committee which manages the mission roles of the village with the assistance of the catechist. A vestry committee elects a chairperson and four person executive to manage its affairs. In all circumstances, the General Synod is empowered to have the overall legislative authority over the entire church (*ACOM Manual*, 2014).

In each layer of governance, the church constitution legislates for the membership. Here the women's membership to the General Synod and other church bodies varies.

Organisational structure

The ACOM adopted a highly institutionalised hierarchical model of organisation. The Archbishop is the head of the church, who oversees the overall mission of the church. The Archbishop together with the Diocesan Bishops form the COB. Its powers and functions are stipulated in the constitution (*ACOM Manual*, 2014: 9-10). The church regulates its mission through the establishment of boards, committees and commissions. Although these organisations have powers to make decisions, they have to be approved by the General Synod. The General Secretary oversees the overall administration and finance of the church and does this through close supervision and association with the five components of the church. Its roles and functions are stipulated in the *ACOM Manual* (2014:10). The General Secretary reports to the Archbishop, and provides reports to the General Synod. Administratively, the recruitment of the General Secretary goes through a lengthy process. Although the Archbishop takes part in the process, he has no right to formally appoint the secretary without consideration and approval by the Executive Council. The term is for four years and can be further renewed for five years. It is a contracted position. Women are members of these church boards, but the conditions of their membership varies. In certain boards, membership is mandated by constitution, while for others, women leaders only represent their organisations, and for others, membership is activated through the process of election. A discussion of women's membership of church boards, and their general participation in decision-making will be discussed later in the thesis.

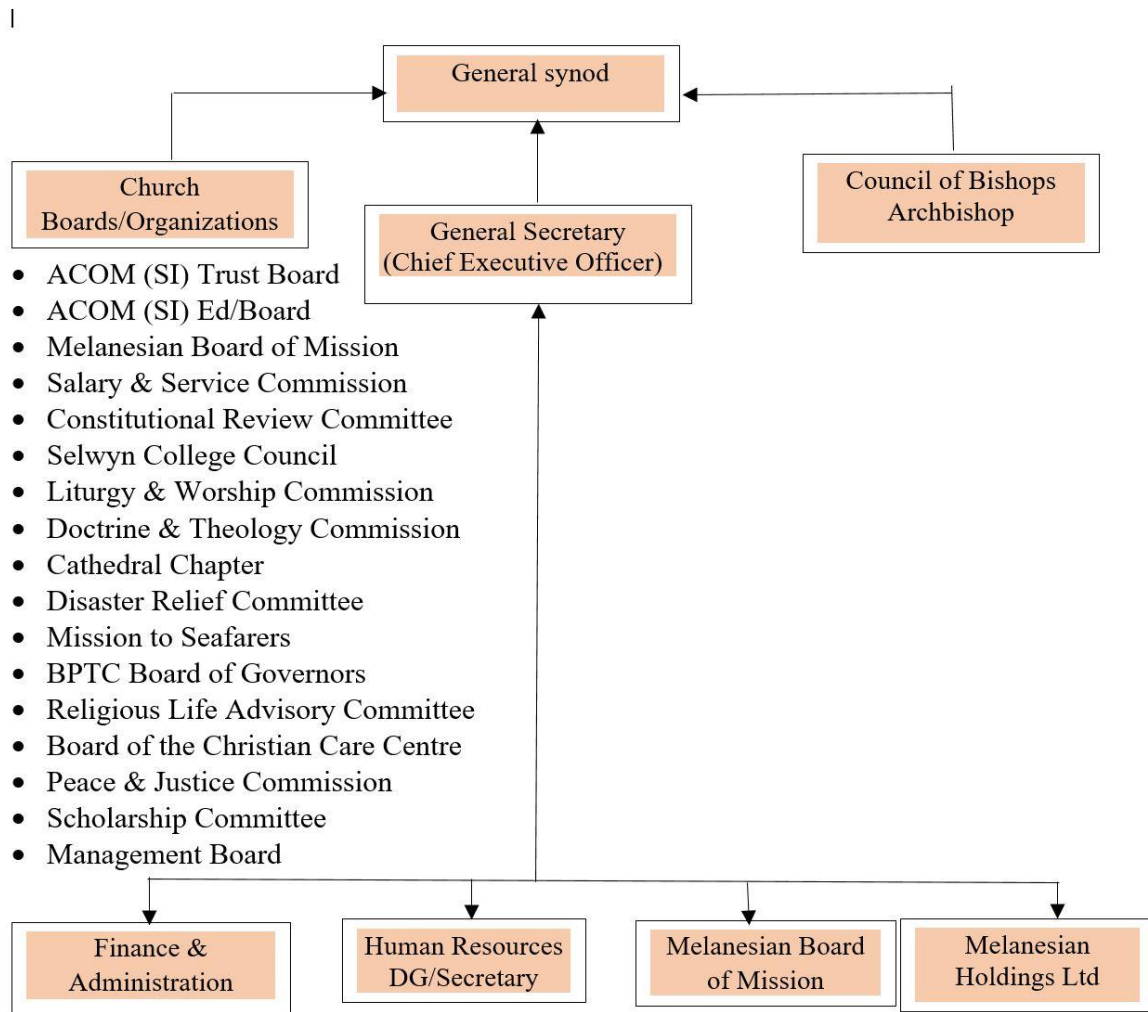


Figure 44: ACOM Organizational Structure

Source: Used with permission from Abraham Hauriasi, PhD thesis, 2011.

The General Synod deals with matters affecting the whole province. It amends existing laws and canons, and introduces new ones. It receives reports from the canonical institutions and boards. It usually meets every three years. The Executive Council of the General Synod meets annually to deal with matters which are mandated to it by the General Synod (ACOM, *Manual*, 2011).

Conclusion

The SSEC and the ACOM have established themselves from two different Christian faith traditions, with varying theological emphasis, and have distinct approaches to local cultures. The SSEC emerged from a conservative evangelical background, non-denominational, with no established international link to a global church network. In

contrast, the ACOM is based on the High Church tradition with an established structure, and has inherited a belief in the sacraments and the apostolic succession, adopting the three-fold ministry of bishops, priests and deacons. In principle the founding missionary bodies, the QKM, and the SSEM have rejected many local cultural practices, yet there is a continuing internal struggle with the influence of Malaitan *kastom*, and traditional religion on the governance of the church (Burt, 1994) especially regarding the roles and position of women. Conversion to Christian life marks a clean-break from local culture, at least in practice. Unlike, the SSEC, the ACOM, following the Melanesian Missionary philosophy, takes a more accommodating and relativist approach to local cultural practices and rituals.

However, while the two churches appear to have major foundational and doctrinal differences, their missionary approach to women's education is relatively the same. The training of potential church leaders' wives was given priority, and training began later for all women. The training began with Bible readings and basic Christian education, but major attention was given to on skills required for managing Christian homes and households. However, regardless of the unequal gender relations and discrimination of women, it is evident that women are using theological and Biblical forums to pursue self-empowerment and emancipation in the context of the church.

The literature review and discourses on gender relations, women's roles and position in both church and local society in the Pacific, Melanesia, and more profoundly Solomon Islands, will be discussed in the next chapter. It examines impact of culture, Christian missionaries, and colonialism on the roles and status of women. It further discusses global frameworks of empowerment, human rights, politics, and development and how village women utilise these frameworks for their own emancipation locally.

Chapter 5: Gender Relations and Women's Empowerment in a Church Setting

Introduction

The Christianity which was introduced in the Pacific emphasised male leadership (Forman, 1984). Gender relations and the unequal participation of women in leadership and decision-making are major concerns that have formed popular discourses in the contemporary socio-economic, religious and political context of Melanesia. In Solomon Islands, the relative lack of women in leadership positions, and unequal access to social and economic development is highly noticeable in all institutions, including churches (see for example, Sade, 1992; Pollard & Waring, 2009; Wood, 2015; Cox, 2017; Soaki, 2017). The theme that dominates many conversations in government institutions, NGOs, and church organisations, is the lack of gender equality for women. This has shown that women are being treated unfairly because of their gender. This continues, despite a number of strategic policy measures by international agencies, government institutions and even by church organisations in Solomon Islands (cf. Eves & Crawford, 2014; Eves et al., 2017; Macintyre, 2017).

The present research focuses on the question of gender relations, the subordination of women in society and empowerment in church contexts in Solomon Islands. It examines the influence of historical missionary philosophies on local churches, and furthermore, indigenous and Christian ideologies and their impact on the status and roles of women in the SSEC and the ACOM in the island of Small Malaita. The study focuses on the women's organisations of the two churches, namely the SSEC Women's Fellowship and the ACOM Mothers' Union.

Gender Relations, Melanesian Personhood, and Egalitarianism

The literature on gender relations in Melanesia and in Solomon Islands has focused on notions of male domination, and women's subordination and discrimination in social, economic, political, and religious spheres (Forman, 1984; Jolly, 1987; Dureau, 1993; Pollard, 2000; Dickson-Waiko, 2003; Douglas, 2003; MacDougall, 2003; Macintyre, 2003; Soaki, 2017; for global comparative study, see Rosaldo & Lamphere, 1974; Ortner, 1981; 1996; Knauft, 1997).

Male dominance over women's lives and discrimination varies in form, and at different levels in society. Given the limited required length of this work, a brief overview of the literature that is directly implicated in this research is necessary. Most researchers, both local and international have documented male dominance in Melanesia and particularly Solomon Islands. For instance, Pollard's (2000) book, *Givers of Wisdom, Labourers without Gain*, provides an account of her own society of 'Are'Are in Solomon Islands. She shows has discussed how the society is structured according to gender. There are clear gendered roles for men and women. In essence, men exercise public leadership over women, while some women are subordinated to male leadership from the periphery. Although certain women may demonstrate similar qualities of leadership, this is discounted by their gender. This inferior treatment extends to education, where boys are prioritised over girls. In a more subtle manner, Scheyvens (2003) points out that the literature about women and gender relations in Melanesia portrays women as "appendages of men, invisible or only visible as wives and mothers" (2003:24-25). In essence men monopolise the public sphere. In national politics, Pauline Soaki (2014) points out that women are constrained by the legacy of missionaries and colonialism. She argues that women's lack of success in national politics cannot be attributed only to local cultural influence, but British colonialism and Christian missionaries have reinforced this and it has infiltrated government and church systems.

Male dominance in church leadership is widespread in the Pacific particularly in Melanesia. Forman (1984) points out that Melanesian women are faced with difficulties when they aspire to public leadership of their respective churches. This was due to strong traditional religious beliefs about the nature and status of women in local culture. Local women cannot assume pastoral leadership positions such as being a priest, pastor and minister because there is a general tendency that women's maternal and menstruation ability has the potential to desacralise the sacred sanctuary and the altar. Women are prohibited from certain spaces in Melanesia, particularly in Solomon Islands, within government, civil society and the local churches. The literature on unequal gendered relations and the poor status of women in Melanesia and in Solomon Islands shows that this inequality is deeply entrenched.

However, contrasting with theoretical stands on gender inequality and domination of women, Strathern (1987; 1988) has suggested that gender relations in Melanesia and

women's status have been misunderstood by earlier Western scholars. This section begins with the review of the literature on Melanesian personhood.

Melanesian Personhood: Dividual/ Partible

The conceptualisation of personhood in Melanesia concerning gender relations has been an active area of debate in the anthropology of Melanesia (Wagner, 1974; 1991; Battaglia, 1983; 1990; Strathern, 1988; Jolly, 1992; Macintyre, 1995; Lipuma, 1998; Rumsey, 2000; Mosko, 2010). A number of researchers, for example Strathern, (1987; 1988) and Battaglia (1990) have argued that Melanesian personhood has been misunderstood and compromised by the Western notion of personhood. They argue that Melanesian personhood is dividual, partible and/or composite (Battaglia, 1990; Strathern, 1988; also see Mosko, 2010), compared to the Western construction of personhood as individual. For Strathern (1988) the person in Melanesia, has multiple points of relationality, and there is fluid and movable social agency, while the Western notion theorises a person as an individual, a compact whole.

Drawing on Leenhardt's (1979 [1947]) research and his "interchangeable bodies", Strathern (1988) suggests that "the human body acts for, and is tasked to, support the personage, the living being" (Strathern, 1988: 268). The body is an agent through which the living-being acts out relationships. As she puts it "...a Hagen woman is compelled to harvest her tubers for her husband. But it would be a misconstruction to read this as the husband's superior powers, and aggrandised subjectivity overriding that of the wife's...in the corresponding relation one subject acts with another subject in mind" (Strathern, 1988:272).

In her widely acclaimed monograph, *The Gender of the Gift*, Strathern (1988) has critiqued Western feminist theorists for attributing the Western notion of gender and relationships to Melanesian cultural systems.

There is a paradox here in Western terms. Whereas Melanesian women and men are as objects celebrated as persons in the eye of others, claimed as sources of activity and the productive outcome of the people's energies, it is as agents that they suffer domination. This does not involve deprivation of subjectivity. It is that their action must reveal the demand of others as its cause. In expanding this paradox, however, it becomes

possible to see afresh the conundrum at the heart of the Western feminist inquiry: Why women submit to the rules that oppress them. It is clear how and why Western scholars pose the question. But it has also become clear that the Melanesian materials will not yield an answer in a familiar form (Strathern, 1988: 388-389).

Strathern (1988) persuasively argues for agency and the medium of sociality. According to Strathern, men and women are agents through which cultural exchanges are effective. Women have multiple agencies through which social actions that encompass relational life are embedded. She argues that a Western observer can understand women as victims of men's behaviour from their own notions of personhood which is familiar to them.

Strathern claims that the notion of individual personhood reflects the Western concept of commodity as a form that existed for itself and was used by society. In this system, "persons own their minds, their (gendered) bodies" (Gewertz, 1990: 797) and are responsible for their own actions. Contrasting the Western construction of individuality, a Melanesian partible notion of gender erases sex difference and locates society above individual interests and significance (Gewertz, 1990). A Melanesian person is a composite gendered-gift, from both parents. "Being male or being female emerges as a holistic unitary state under particular circumstances... each male or female may be regarded as containing within it a suppressed identity" (Strathern, 1988: 14). In this sense, men and women's actions are considered as gifts drawn to each other respectively. Hence, the conceiving and birth of a child cannot be attributed to a woman alone, but to the man as well, because the action caused to each other entails the gift of a child. In socio-economic gender relations, similar concepts can be applied. Hence when a husband utilises the food his wife produces, Strathern warns that it must not be misunderstood as exploitation or domination (Strathern, 1988, see also, Gewertz, 1990: 798).

However, while Strathern's (1988; see also, Wagner, 1974) well known notions of "partible" or "dividual" personhood are celebrated as pertinent to Melanesia, her proposition was criticised for not accounting for culture change in the region (Macintyre, 1995) and for essentialising the Melanesian "dividual" and Western "individual" constructions of personhood (Mosko, 2010: 216). Focusing on the economic change in Massim, Macintyre (1995: 29-43) argues that the characterisations of Melanesia as fixed to "dividual" personhood while locating the Western notion of person as "individual" fails to take account economic change. For over a century, regions of Melanesia have been

colonised by Europeans, and new economic and monetised exchange systems were imposed and transformed people's lives. In the Massim region of Papua New Guinea, "indentured labour, local copra production, wages and a monetised economy were introduced to the region. These institutions have been practised and have transformed social relations and ideas about the production of wealth" (Macintyre, 1995:29-30). Macintyre argues that the proposition of "partible" or "dividual" notion of personhood is ahistorical in Massim.

Personhood in Melanesian Christianity has also been debated. There is a disparity between relational theology of corporate life, and individual Christianity that is predicated on personal salvation (see Eriksen, 2014; Robbins, 2014). Theologically, Christians are considered as multiple persons, embodying the Holy Spirit and the person of Jesus Christ at the time of baptism (Hess, 2006: 294; see also, Baker, 1990a, 1990b; 1992; Limstrome, 1999; Robbins, 2004; Mosko, 2005; 2010), but in essence, the church which emerged basing its theology on the Bible has established a gender-based category of gendered individuality.

The literature on Christian personhood in Melanesia focuses more on "dividual" and "individual" differences in terms of spiritual relations to God. Less attention is drawn to gender relations in the church. Strathern's (1988) theoretical construction of personhood focuses more on ritual exchanges within cultural contexts, for example, than marital relationships. According to her theory, actions that are being conducted by each gender towards another (husband to a wife) are a gift of oneself. As noted by LiPuma (1998) such theorisation which involves the ritual exchange between husband and wife as a reciprocal gift, would not be conceived in the case of gender relations, and the roles that men and women performed in Solomon Islands. With the increasing awareness and knowledge of women's rights and access to Biblical and theological learning, there is a tendency to question the decisions that church authorities have made that affect women's lives. The notion of dividual has been challenged by the increasing individual interest on the part of male control in the church. On the other hand, in response, women have taken a collective dividual in the form of female gender individualism to critique male attitudes.

The discourse on gender relations in Melanesia, particularly in Solomon Islands, is thus informed by a theoretical framework and cross-cultural ethnographical findings. This section has discussed gender relations in Melanesia by drawing on themes of egalitarianism, complementarianism, work and Melanesian personhood. Themes discussed included consideration of ethnographic reports offering concrete evidence of theoretical assumptions in the discussion of gender relations, and the status of women in Solomon Islands church settings.

The review has shown that while women in other cultures in Melanesia are endowed with certain positions of power in socio-economic, political and religious spheres parallel to that of the men, there nevertheless is evidence that males' positions of power and leadership are incomparable. From their onset, Melanesian societies emphasised egalitarian values, and in most cases, men and women sought to complement each other's roles for social cohesiveness. These mechanisms do not compromise male powers. Furthermore, while the Strathern's 'dividualism' proposition may have connoted a significant value in society, the presumed Melanesian personhood is ahistorical in terms of the practicality of women's social experience in contemporary societies.

Considering the current research focus, the SSEC and the ACOM, as Christian organisations, have continually and publicly advocated for the values of egalitarian and complementary relationships, and seek to live dividual relational livelihoods, in terms of gender relations. However, in contrast, the SSEC and the ACOM socio-religious ideology, behaviour, and structure do not support the theological imperative of relational equality of genders and persons. Indigenous cultures and churches' approach to Biblical hermeneutics have the upper hand in effecting the ongoing tendency of "cultural evaluations" (Ortner, 1996:) that significantly devises symbolic images of women as polluted, hence being conceived as inferior to men. This behaviour has led to the practice of perceiving women as not sufficient to assume sacred public offices in the church.

Egalitarianism

Strathern (1988) argues for a relational philosophy in Melanesian social life and has critiqued the Western subjectivity of Melanesian cultural practice and gender relations. Strathern (1988) argues that men in all societies, have the ability to reconstruct individual status from webs of relations to represent collectivities. She argues that scholars have long

misunderstood gender relations in Melanesia due to experiences and influences inherited from their own cultural orientations regarding gender notions. Strathern theorises relationality, and the embeddedness of the individual in relationality, and centralises the argument that a person is not an individual, an entity on its own. Rather a person is a relational being, who exists in relation to family, tribe or community. This critique has rejected a Western notion of personhood which theorises individuality, a non-relational individual. By using terms such as misrepresentation and misunderstanding, Strathern rejects the conceptual validity of gendered 'inequality', with its related experiences of subordination and discrimination in Melanesian social life. For Strathern (1988), Melanesian social life and gender relations are grounded in people's egalitarian commitments, the

complementary roles performed by men and women, and the co-sharing of responsibilities which are practised as norms and performed in Melanesian society. Strathern writes that:

The people of this part of the world ... do not have the conceptual tools of stratified state systems which project fantasies of a common humanity or unitise the citizen-isolate... nor indeed of a capitalist economy which commodifies 'sex'. Many of them, however, do seem to have vested interests in maintaining internal relations among themselves through exchanges of all kinds which simultaneously preserve differences between categories of persons and enable them to enter into relationships with one another... (Strathern, 1987: 6).

The Blackwell *Dictionary of Anthropology* (Barfield, 1997) describes egalitarian societies as "...those with no sharp divisions of rank, status and wealth" (145-146). The definition is further clarified:

In this negative sense, societies are egalitarian because they lack the characteristic associated with stratified, state-organised societies. They are the beginning point of a process of evolutionary differentiation through competitive exclusion ... the first and simplest form of society.

The definition and descriptions provided by Strathern and consolidated by the *Dictionary of Anthropology* about egalitarian social life highlight two related aspects. First, egalitarian social life flourishes in non-state-organised societies with limited stratification. It has no established leadership structure that outlines the dichotomy of power relations between categories of people, including male and female. And secondly, based on a non-structured

social system, people practise reciprocity and sharing. To Strathern (1988), these features mark out Melanesian egalitarian social life. But how realistic are these descriptions in contemporary Melanesia?

A literature review on political egalitarianism is significant to this study. Political egalitarianism deals with power dynamics within gender relations. Age, gender and status are mediums through which political power is established. But furthermore, an analysis of Strathern's proposition on political egalitarianism in Melanesian is important to ascertain its validity in Melanesia. Established social and political organisations are necessary for social cohesiveness and continuity, and gender differences are a vital component of these organisations. By referring to Melanesian societies as egalitarian, Strathern's proposition may have encapsulated Marshall Sahlins's (1963) influential paper, *Poor Man, Rich Man, Big-Man, Chief: Political Types in Melanesia and Polynesia*. In his article, Sahlins discussed two socio-political systems in the Pacific. He pointed out that Melanesian social life is egalitarian and thus, politically practised the *Big-Man* political system, while on the other hand, Polynesian societies are hierarchical and have adopted organised political systems which are *chiefly* systems (Keesing, 1997; Lindstrom, 1997; Spriggs, 1997; White, 1997; White & Lindstrom, 1997; Moore, 2004; Pollard, 2006). According to the theory, the difference between the two systems is that Melanesian societies are more egalitarian and without organised indigenous political structures. Thus, in this case, the people's social and economic lives are symmetrical, and based on reciprocity and communal living.

In contrast, however, McDowell (1990: 182) argues that to assert that Melanesian societies are egalitarian and stateless, while Polynesia societies are hierarchical in social and political life is misleading. Both societies have a mix of these systems (Coppet, 1985; Keesing, 1997; Spriggs, 1997; Pollard, 2006). Studies conducted in Solomon Islands (for example, Ivens, 1972; Dureau, 1993; Burt, 1994; Keesing, 1997; McDougall, 2003; Scott, 2007) have shown that egalitarian values do not exclusively correspond to a non-established leadership structure. Egalitarian values co-existed with asymmetrical relationships in gender roles, in established indigenous political structures there. Keesing (1997) has noted that in many regions of Solomon Islands, there are structures with leaders whose titles are hereditary, existing alongside those with non-indigenous established structures. He argues that even in non-established chiefly structures like Kwaio, the *Big-Man system* does not exist there (Keesing, 1997: 254). Writing about 'Are'Are, Pollard (2006; 2000) discusses

its indigenous leadership structures and the division of gender roles. On the one hand, the 'Are'Are society is patriarchal and has adopted the *Araha* (chief) system. The *Araha* is a male, and the chiefly status and authority is inherited. Men with non-chiefly status play corresponding roles of leadership in their respective clans. On the other hand, women perform roles subordinating to men's leadership, by ensuring that homes and family welfare are well managed.

Many scholars (for example, Keesing, 1978; Laracy, 1983; Keesing, 1997; Scott, 2007; Akin, 2013) who have written about the post-World War Two nationalist movement *Maasina Rul*, have noted how the Small Malaita *Alaha 'Ou'ou* (*Araha*) chiefly system has been used to advance the political ambitions of the Solomon Islanders, especially Malaitans. The chiefly system was used because of the manner in which it is organised. It has an established structure that embraces patriarchal power over large extended geographical zones (Keesing, 1997: 254-255).

John Susupuri (*Solomon Times Online*, 27 September 2008)⁴² further outlined the *Alaha 'Ou'ou* chiefly system and the rights of inheritance of male leadership. The system is structured following the *Iola* (traditional canoe) model. Certain levels (mostly three) of the structure are vested with various responsibilities in controlling the tribes and clans, and at the same time they are responsible for advising chiefs. Walter Ivens (1972), in his study of Sa'a and Ulawa, *Melanesians of the South-east Solomon Islands*, also discusses the hierarchical chiefly structures practised in Sa'a and the roles men and women perform. He noted (1972) the roles and status of Sa'a women and the strict rules prescribing staying in designated female spaces to avoid contact with men (cf. Keesing, 1982; Burt, 1994). Women, including wives and unmarried women, ensured that enough food gardens were cultivated, and the supply of food was available for family consumption. During the *mangadja* (bonito/tuna season), men are required to participate in the entire season, which could last for a period of two months (January and February) in *taoha* (men's canoe house). The season and the ritual of *mangadja*⁴³ is important for re-enactment of the clan's reputation, but more specifically, men's personal status. Although Ivens (1927) made these

⁴² 'Chiefly system of Small Malaita', *Solomon Times Online*, 27 March 2008.

⁴³ A *mangadja* is the tuna or bonito fishing season. Culturally, young men attained the status of manhood through the ritual of *malaohu*, where a young man is tested to fish for a bonito on a bamboo pole with a locally made fishing *te'i* (bonito fishing hook). During a *mangadja* season, a clan *ta'e olu* (a three-seat canoe) that gets more bonito gains has a highly respected status in the tribal community over other clans.

observations in the late 1920s, and the ritual practice of *mangada* had been abandoned by the end of the 1980s, the pattern of gendered roles and men's continued participation in public life and cultural rituals have become the norm in Small Malaita today.

In matrilineal societies, hereditary chiefly systems also existed. However, in most cases, men appear prominently as chiefs or even paramount chiefs. In Ranongga, McDougall (2014) has documented the local leadership system. She argues that leadership is traditionally inherited through female lines in Ranongga (McDougall, 2014). She has also noted the powerful presence of some men who were also associated with indigenous leadership and were regarded as important men in positions of *bangara* (chief or clan tribal leader) (see Thomas, 2009). Wilson G. Liligeto (2006), a local chief's secretary of Marovo, has documented the presence of a female *bangara* (chief). He also cites other powerful male chiefs that were authoritative. Geoffrey White (1991) describes the *tripod* governing systems in Ysabel, where indigenous leadership is amalgamated with the church (ACOM), and the provincial government. White (1991) notes that the tribal chiefly system had existed in pre-Christian times in Ysabel, before the paramount chief system emerged through the influence of the Melanesian Mission. In terms of land and property ownership rights, women are culturally recognised as being the rightful owners; nevertheless, studies have shown that leadership and land management have always been controlled by men (White, 1991; Keesing, 1997).

While egalitarian social values are emphasised in Melanesian societies, particularly in Solomon Islands, studies have also demonstrated that established chiefly structures have also existed in Solomon Islands, juxtaposed with non-egalitarian gender relations. In certain instances, the 'big-man system' does not exist in some non-established cultural groups, especially in the case of Kwaio, and Kwara'ae. There is a hierarchy of gendered roles. Men mostly assume leadership positions, while women manage household welfare.

The literature on Melanesian egalitarian social life does not include gender relations in church organisations and settings. However, the church is viewed as an egalitarian institution. St Paul (1 Corinthians 12:12-27) has described the church as a human body, in which its body parts are equally important and interdependent and sustain each other. In this sense, the church is theorised as the body of Christ, a Christian community of co-equals where its members live a communal life, and through the value of love they embrace each

other. Paul further articulates the notion of equality of persons and gender in Christ, the church, when he writes to the Christians in Colossae (Colossians 3:11) and Galatia (Galatians 3:27-29) speaking about the equality of male and female, and other cultural and religious differences (Tucker & Liefeld, 1987:65-66).

In Solomon Islands and Melanesia, while churches have publicly taught the communal values of equality, sharing and reciprocity, churches function within a male hierarchical structure that replicates local indigenous social structures. For example, as Charles W. Forman (1984: 153-172) noted in his work, *Sing to the Lord a New Song: Women in the Churches of Oceania*, local women's leadership in the Pacific has not been supported by Pacific traditions. In Melanesia, women did not hold formal leadership positions. Forman (1984) further noted the difference in church views about church formal leadership positions (offices). Unlike the other churches, such as the Congregationist churches, and Methodists, (United Church in Solomon Island), the Anglican and Roman Catholic Churches emphasised sacraments and church governance. They have historically viewed the church and its offices as sacred, and therefore refrain from ordaining women to these offices (bishops, priests, and deacons) because women contravene that sacredness (Forman, 184:10-171).

There is a disparity among Protestant non-episcopal churches in Solomon Islands. For example, the United Church in Solomon Islands (UCSI) ordained a woman for the first time in early 2000. However, women's leadership is not considered equal to men's in church ministries. Women's roles are mostly confined to specialised ministries such as chaplains in prisons and hospitals where development, agency, and empowerment, might be experienced (Cox, 2017; see also, McDougall, 2003). In the SSEC, women do not hold formal leadership positions such as minister and bishop. A number of women have become pastors, and deaconesses; however, their roles are segregated compared to male pastors. In the case of Solomon Islands, churches are not egalitarian in the manner described by Strathern. Structures of inequality among men and women concerning leadership roles and other functions are clearly gendered. Men usually hold important formal leadership roles, while women are responsible to male leaders (MacDougall, 2003; cf. Ericksen, 2005).

From the outset, the Shalin's (1963) and Strathern's (1988) proposition that political egalitarianism is pertinent in Melanesia does not work. Framing the situation in Melanesia in Sherry Ortner's (1974: 71; 1996) terms, it is evident to say "women are treated as inferior to men and whatever form it may take and to whatever degree it occurs, such perceptions are a universal experience for women in everyday social life". There is a lack of ethnographic research to suggest that political egalitarianism does exist in Melanesia. It does not exist both at the social or political levels in Melanesian Christianity including Small Malaita.

The cultural evaluation of women in churches in Solomon Islands has been influenced by both indigenous cultures and the Bible. For example, St Paul, in his letters to Christian churches in the Mediterranean world, offered sentiments of cultural evaluation in the form of instructions concerning women's roles and status, and behaviour in the church community. He writes to the Ephesians (Ephesians 5:22-23) about Christian couples, underlining the headship of husbands over their wives and their total submission due to them. Furthermore, he writes to Timothy (1 Timothy 2:9-15) giving him instruction against improper Christian women's dress codes, behaviour, and their status in the church community compared to men. The Pauline ideologies and instructions resemble Ortner's theory of "cultural evaluation" (Ortner, 1996:23):

I also want women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or expensive clothes, but with good deeds, appropriate for women who profess to worship God. A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or have authority over a man, she must be silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner. But women will be saved through childbearing – if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety (1Timothy 2:9-15).

Solomon Island societies are structurally patriarchal, emphasising general egalitarian values rather than practicing gender equality. Eves (2017: 41; Jolly, 1996) notes how gender inequality is enforced by Christian churches, invoking the notion that the father is rightly the head of the family and therefore has power to make decisions. Such teaching reinforces cultural beliefs and practices. The paradoxical stand of churches towards women – promoting a general equality of humanity while maintaining inequality between men and women – has clearly demonstrated that the church is not an egalitarian institution, even

though they publicly advocate equality of persons, male and female. “Seeds of inequality” (Josephides, 1985:1) exist in every organisation.

Gender Relations, Complementarity, and Work

Complementarity in gender relations has mediated social order in the absence of gender equality in Melanesia (Weiner, 1976). Many researchers have argued that gender relations in Melanesia are complementarian rather than an expression of inequality of status that connotes a dichotomy of power relations between men and women (O’Brien & Tiffany 1984; Chowning, 1987; Keesing, 1987; Nash, 1987; Pollard, 2006). Strathern (1988) argues that Melanesian gender relations do not deal with the dichotomy of power relations as in the case of Western gender relations. Such framing fails to capture the reality of the Melanesian social world (Strathern, 1988; cf. Macintyre, 2017:7-8).

Nancy McDowell (1984) describes the nature of complementarity as follows:

If the two entities, groups, ideas, or things are complementary, it usually means that they are related or somehow connected either in a metaphorical or metonymic sense, either paradigmatically or syntagmatically. It also means that they are different in character or content and that these differences are substantial. Further, these differences are reciprocal, as each complements or completes the other in some essential way to form a whole (McDowell, 1984:32-33).

A number of scholars (Forge, 1972; Weiner, 1976; Nash, 1987; McDowell, 1990; Pollard, 2006) have argued that gender relations in Melanesian social life are complementary rather than asymmetrical. Men and women occupy various domains of power that need to “complete” (McDowell, 1990: 32-33) each other’s roles to enhance social cohesiveness. In most cases, women’s domains are found mostly in agriculture and domestic economic life, while men assume household and public leadership roles. Writing about Trobriand social life, especially male and female relationships, Annette B. Weiner (1976:11) noted that “Melanesia female/male symmetrical and complimentary oppositions constituted elements basic to conceptualisation of social order”. With this, Weiner argues that men and women have different forms of resources under their control. However, as she noted, these forms of powers and control are culturally integrated to enhance social order.

For the Nagovisi matrilineal tribal community in Bougainville, Jill Nash (1987) noted the complementary roles men and women perform to preserve the social order. The husband and wife are endowed with gendered qualities of ‘strength’ and ‘talk.’ Men have strength

to protect wives from enemies and use physical strength to cultivate the land for subsistence. According to Nash, this gendered distinction is perceived logically as a natural order. For instance, the right hand is for male because it has strength, and when lightning strikes and kills people or destroys trees, the Nagovisi people are certain that it is a male thunder. Accordingly, these gendered roles complement differences and establish social cohesiveness.

Errington and Gewertz (1987), following Keesing, reconsider Margaret Mead's economic theory of Chambri female dominance and claim that both men and women are "persons of worth" (Errington & Gewertz, 1987:63). They argue that men and women's roles complement each other. In Kove, Papua New Guinea, Ann Chowning (1987) revealed that gender and power relations appear to be based on interdependent relations between men and women. Their success and status are interchangeably reliant on the ritual ceremonies they perform that bear on their social status. For instance, there is an acknowledgement that without women, men could not achieve their status. And likewise, without the women's fathers, women cannot achieve equal status with men. Similar trends relating to the balance of male and female power occur in Tubetube. Macintyre (1987) explains that the women's political roles and economic control over land do not differentiate them from the men. They are holders of wealth, feast givers, orators and leaders of lineage groups; thus their capacities are equivalent with men.

In Solomon Islands, Roger Keesing (1987) was struck by "Kwaio women's self-account focusing on their culturally perceived responsibility for reproducing an apparent male-dominated customary order" (Lederman, 1990:177). This is striking considering that he was presenting the culture and religion of the Kwaio people as male-dominated in his previous work in the 1970s and early 1980s. It is a troubling situation for Keesing (1987) to conclude whether the Kwaio women are truly subordinated and oppressed. Thus, he questions the researcher's scientific attitude in perceiving the local women's roles in local society and their position in complementing that of the men. He questions the Western methodological, epistemological and theoretical approach to gender relations and women's subordination in Kwaio. "Are women muted? How do women perceive their own perhaps polluting bodies?" Most centrally Keesing asks, "Do the Kwaio women's accounts reveal that women are unequal, oppressed and subordinate?" (Keesing, 1987:58; see McDowell 1990:645). He concludes by explaining that the Kwaio men and women have had different,

potentially contradictory, but interestingly interconnected constitutive powers” (Keesing, 1987:60; McDowell, 1990: 177).

In ‘Are‘Are, Pollard (2006) observed that women were held in high regard in the family while men and women performed different roles and functions as designated by the ‘Are ‘Are society. Writing about Small Malaita, Wate (2013) has noted that in the recent past, some women were assigned religious priestly functions of purification. However, such religious roles were gendered but exclusively feminine, only to be performed on postnatal women to restore their status to *mola* or normal. Gender roles in these contexts were not necessarily ranked or classified as in a Western understanding but were based on particular social circumstances. These gendered religious roles are necessary to complement men’s religious roles that cannot be afforded to women because of cultural restrictions.

In discussing the dynamics of complementarity in Melanesia, Forge (1972) argues that only males are equal, while females are dissimilar and thus need complementarity. In both cases, complementarity is a mechanism necessary to maintain social order, because both men and women have their own domains of power and capabilities. However, on one hand, it appears that complementarity mitigates the absence of equality, while on the other, signifies the differences between men and women.

Furthermore, complementarity enacts social order; however, it also emphasises the structure of inequality. This is because women focus more on domestic activities, while men are involved in public affairs (McDowell, 1987: 34). This dichotomy of gender relations has set out men for public leadership and women for domestic work (Rosaldo & Lamphere, 1974; Ortner & Whitehead, 1981; Ortner, 1996). The dichotomy that exists between men and women is expressed in all aspects of life in Melanesia.

Rosaldo (1974) also recognises the complexities of cross-cultural comparisons which challenge the Western notion of gender roles as a “natural endowment” (Rosaldo, 1974: 18) for men to perform certain roles and activities and women to perform other roles due to their natural make-up (Rosaldo, 1974:18-19). She acknowledges that there are certain roles that are usually considered naturally and primarily designated to a particular gender, such as child-raising, although in their ways both men and women raise children. In many circumstances, men and women perform similar roles, and in some circumstances, women

appear more powerful in controlling the economic life of the family. However, there has always been a tendency that more power and status are accorded to men than women. Whatever cultural arrangements there are, “the prestige values always attach to the activities of men” (Rosaldo, 1974:19; quoting Mead, 1935: 302). In a way, while Rosaldo’s (1974) cultural analysis has raised significant knowledge about the different roles men and women play in other parts of the world, there has not been a significant departure from Ortner’s propositions of gender inequality. Men have maintained power and control over women.

Christian Feminism and Theological Discourses

The discourses on women’s position and leadership in the church and society has received wider attentions in christian feminism and theological debates. While the debate is complex, the discourse presented itself in two popular binary positions. On the one hand, a number of feminists (see Ruether, 1983; Fionrenza, 1992; 1993; 1994; 1995; Hampson, 1996; Web, 1999) argue that the Bible is predominantly a male text that invoked notion of patriarchy. It is a feminist position that somewhat, drives toward egalitarianism-the need to see the equality of gender in the church. However, on the other, evangelical feminist scholars argue that while the Bible was written through human hands, it is the inerrant word of God that must be literally interpreted and applied. One of the hallmark of this evangelical feminism is that the subordination of women to men is perceived as a preordained (see Dermot, 1985; Hassey, 1989; Elliott, 2002; 2003; Kenny, 2006).

The Bible as a Patriarchal Text

In the 1970s, Christian feminists and theologians began criticising male dominance in churches and men for their sexist approach in giving women subordinate status far removed from women’s potential for leadership in the church (Ruether, 1983). Fundamentally, two positions have formed the basis of theological feminism. Attention is drawn, first, to “women’s experience”, and second, to the rejection of patriarchy, a structure through which men assume power over women (Fiorenza, 1993; 1992; Reuther, 1983). For instance, Ruether (1983) reiterated that the “present situation” of women’s livelihood and experience, should provide the basis for feminist theology. She warns against the

traditionally held statement about the condition of women that defines their status and roles in the church (Ruether, 1983: xi).

Ruether (1983) further stated that while feminist theology ought to draw its attention to the present experience of women, in addressing this experience, however, feminist theorists need to be clear about the “real issues” that should never occur to women, but, in reality, do affect them. Feminist theology needs to be conscious about what was “inherently told about women” that was not always true (Ruether, 1983). In other words, what were the religious and cultural descriptions and meanings that the Christian community has ascribed to women? This significant point is raised by Ortner (1996) and other critics (Rosaldo, & Lamphere, 1974; Ortner & Whitehead, 1981). In reality, Ruether’s (1983) critical appraisal has provided an impetus for Christian feminists to dig deeper into how and why women are segregated.

In seeking out answers to women’s oppression, traditional theological feminists centred their critique on their readings and interpretations of the Bible and the historical accounts of women in the early church. For example, the Christian feminist theologian, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza. Fiorenza (1995; also, Ruether, 1983; Hampson, 1996) observe that the Bible is a patriarchal text. Ruether (1983) refers to the Bible as a toxic text, while others allege that the Biblical text is sexist because the early church fathers and reformers did not seek to recover the “hidden history” of women to highlight their involvement in the church (Fiorenza, 1995, Ruether, 1983).

In one of her popular works, *In Memory of Her*, Fiorenza (1995) argues that the writers of the Gospels displayed a sexist approach to the woman in the Bible who anointed the feet of Jesus. This is implied in the manner in which the Gospel of Mark fails to name the woman but instead has reconfigured her as a sinner.

In the passion account of Mark’s Gospel three disciples figure prominently: on the one hand, two of the twelve – Judas who betrays Jesus and Peter who denies him – and on the other, the unnamed woman who anoints Jesus. But while the stories of Judas and Peter are engraved in the memory of Christians, the story of the woman is virtually forgotten... Although the story of the anointing is told in all four Gospels, it is obvious that the redactional retelling of the story seeks to make the story more palatable to a patriarchal Greco-Roman audience (Fiorenza, 1995: xv).

According to Fiorenza (1995), this attitude by the writers of the Bible clearly demonstrated the ongoing patriarchal supremacy and androcentric attitude towards women. This conviction has led Christian feminist theology and Biblical interpretation into a process of rediscovering and redeeming the true status of women and the roles they played in the historical formation of the early church and the Christian scripture (Fiorenza 1995: xiv; cf. Tucker & Liefeld, 1987).

Val Webb (1999) like Fiorenza (1985), embraces a similar view, but goes further to explain how and why women suffer patriarchal dominance and sexism in the Bible, in Christianity and in Christian communities. She alleges that the experience of subordination, sexism and oppression of women are effects of a complex homogenisation of cultures that defined the social nature of women under the Roman Empire, whose world was set within a framework of patriarchal authority:

Like it or not, when the Roman Empire took on Christianity in the fourth century, Western thinking and Christian thinking were linked together, first under an emperor, then under the Pope, Greek philosophy, Jewish law and the writings of the early church fathers shaped how the Bible was assembled and later interpreted. All these traditions operated under a patriarchal worldview (Webb, 1999: 15).

Patriarchy refers to the “rule of the father”, a social system that embraces the legal, social, economic and political activities of the dependent persons in the household under the authority of the father (Webb, 1999:15). Dependents including the wife do not have a legal status or rights in property, and male children inherit the father’s properties and authority to the exclusion of women. With the same authority, the husband assumes power over the wife’s body. The wife’s body is the property of the husband where at his discretion, either he beats it (the female body), restricts its movement or to a certain extent sells it (Webb, 1999).

Webb (1999) also argues that sexism and the inferior classification of women penetrated the Bible and Christian theology through Jewish and Greek philosophers. Philo, a renowned Jewish philosopher, writing at the time of Jesus assigned the binary of public and domestic spaces to gender categories. He presupposed that “communities” had two categories, great and small, equating to city and household, with men qualified for the management of urban and public spaces, and women responsible for the household (Webb, 1999: 15). These cultural systems affected the Western worldview of the gender roles and the status of men and women.

Biblical narratives such as the story of the woman who anointed the feet of Jesus and the Pauline laws restricting the conduct of women in public worship and social life are typical examples of sexism and the marginalisation of women as highlighted by feminist theologians such as Webb (1999), Fiorenza (1995) Ruether (1983) and others. One of the persistent examples of the subordinated nature of women and sexism is Ephesians Chapter 5, in which Paul advised the Christian women in Ephesus to be submissive to their husbands (Turker & Liefeld, 1987).

Women's leadership in formal offices of the church has also been confronted by Old Testament restrictions on women because of their bodily conditions. In the early church, Bishop Dionysius of Alexandria (in office 247-264 CE) explained one of the reasons that barred women from ordination to priesthood. Tucker & Liefeld (1987) noted:

not only should women not to be touched during the time of their separation [i.e. menstruation] but a woman is not to approach the holy table or touch the holy body and blood of the Lord [i.e. sacrament]. The reason is that during her period she is not perfectly pure in soul and body (Tucker & Liefeld, 1987:111)

This restriction on women draws much influence from *Torah*, the Old Testament law, from the book of Leviticus 15:19-24. As expressed by Tucker and Liefeld (1987), women's menstrual emissions were considered to produce defilement that would desecralise the holy table and the Lord's body and blood. This explanation is similar to the local perspective of *abu* or *apu* of women noted in regions of Malaita (Iven, 1972; Maranda, 1974; Keesing, 1982; Akin, 1992; 2013; Burt, 1994; Pollard, 2000a).

Over time, it has become perceived theologically that the natural order is that men rule over women'. In many circumstances, that natural order is theologically articulated as God's designed order for humanity (Webb, 1999: 15-16). A major problem for Christianity in Melanesia, particularly in Solomon Islands, has been to understand that much of the theological beliefs underpinning the status of women have historical influences from a mixture of cultures, philosophies, and worldviews in the Greco-Roman and Jewish world. Hence the assertion that the law surrounding the rule of men over women is God-given is a major challenge to Christianity on Small Malaita. Both the SSEC and ACOM have often been entangled in this issue of what is divinely instituted and what is culturally constructed.

For the SSEC this is a particular dilemma, since its foundational statement of faith has clearly defined that the whole content of the Bible is the inerrant word of God (Ernst, 1994) that must be strictly followed unconditionally. Although the ACOM does not have such a strict fundamental statement of faith as the SSEC regarding the Bible, the ACOM on Small Malaita believes that the rules outlined in the Bible for women must be followed because they are compatible with the traditional cultural regulations governing women on Small Malaita.

Indeed, there has been a common recognition of the state of inequality between men and women concerning leadership roles, and the space women occupy in the church and the wider Christian communities. Being a woman disqualifies one from access to the common roles and space that men assumed and enjoy. Despite the prevalence of this social condition, not all Christian feminists theorise about women's experience of Scripture in the same way. This state of contradiction and discrepancy has caused considerable confusion to Christian communities concerning the status and leadership roles of women in the church.

Leadership in Pacific Christian churches has been criticised for being male-dominated. For example, although women in the Congregational, Presbyterian, and Lutheran Presbyterian churches are given some leadership authority, women do not always have equal access to the same power and privileges like men (cf. Cox, 2017; McDougall, 2017). There are certain positions of authority and senior leadership positions that are reserved for men. In Melanesia and Solomon Islands, the Catholic Church and the ACOM are resistant to ordaining women into formal leadership positions of the church (bishop, priest and deacon) (Forman, 1984), but intriguingly, the SSEC, an evangelical church, has also been resistant to ordaining women to leadership positions such as pastor, reverend minister and bishop. These offices are regarded as sacred and women are not allowed to undertake them (Forman, 1984: 153-172; Langmore, 1987; Jolly, 1989; cf. Burt, 1994).

Not only in formal leadership are women discriminated against, but this occurs more generally in church communities, where there is a general pattern of subordination of women to male leadership, and their engagement in caring for the church physical setup (Robert, 2002; MacDougall, 2003; Pollard, 2003; Scheyvens, 2003; Eriksen, 2005; Choi & Jolly, 2014). Women normally live in fear of attending church services due to the tendency for them to be criticised or humiliated by male leaders (Forman, 1984). The disparity of

women's and men's roles and status in church life is well summed up in the following words:

In many instances the role of women in the church has not been as noteworthy as that of men. After all, it is mainly men who have preached, led church councils, and written theology. But frequently women have been overlooked even when they are outstanding contributors (Tucker & Liefeld, 187:13)

In a similar tone, Rose Kara Ninkama (a female theological student from Papua New Guinea) sums up women's conditions in Melanesian Christian churches as follows:

In most societies, women have been considered inferior, passive, and unintelligent; men have thus been conditioned to feel superior, aggressive, and intelligent. By so polarising the sexes, each one is actually limited to a proper sphere (Ninkama, 1987: 128).

Evangelical Feminism & Biblical Feminism

While Christian feminism strongly criticises patriarchal authority, male-dominant interpretation, and sexism in the Bible, there have been internal disagreements among Christians concerning the sources and epistemological approaches to feminism, gender, and hierarchy (Dermot, 1985). Among these are evangelical feminism and post-Biblical feminism, which have their own emphasis (Dermot, 1985; Hassey, 1989; Kenny, 2006)

For instance, while evangelical feminism would affirm the authority of the Bible and its historical creeds, it rejects hierarchy in the relationship between men and women in favour of mutual subordination within male and female relationships. The evangelicals are challenged as to whether to permit church leadership for both males and females or restrict certain leadership roles to men that women should not assume. This has created the two sub-strands within evangelical feminism: the complementarians and the egalitarians (Pierce & Groothuis, 2005)

Evangelical complementarians theorise that the difference between men and women appears prominently in the Bible. While it is perceived that men and women are equal, there are certain leadership roles that are designated for men that women cannot perform. Women are restricted from full participation in leadership roles and decision-making in the church setting. In this context, women would have to complement and support men to fulfil or accomplish leadership roles (Dermot, 1985; Hassey, 1989; Pierce & Groothuis, 2005; Kenny, 2006). The emphasis is on male leadership and not leadership in the church and

home (Pierce & Groothuis, 2005: 15). It seems that the focus is on the 'gender' of the leader and not the organisation. This trend of theological thinking can be found in the SSEC and the ACOM on Small Malaita. It is a dilemma that constantly confronts the two churches.

There are evangelical feminist theorists who conceptualise gender inequality as a fundamental part of Christianity. Theorists who take on this position are perceived as egalitarians. They hold that there is no significant difference between men and women other than biological. However, because of the idea that equality should not be seen as cultural or political, the term Biblical equality has emerged, which builds on what the Bible has instructed (Pierce, Groothuis, & Fee, 2005: 16-17). But fundamental to evangelical feminism is the division between men and women on the question of gender in relation to leadership. This poses a division between evangelical complementarians and egalitarians. The crucial question to ask here is: what has God pre-designated for men and not prescribed to women? As noted by Groothuis and Peirce (2005), there is a belief among evangelicals that the gender roles of men and women within the family circle are complementary without being hierarchical (Fee, 2000: 155). This notion holds that God created male and female as equal but distinct and that they need to uphold a complementary relationship. However, it could also be argued that patriarchal authority is inherent in such relationships.

It must be noted that the Biblical egalitarians refute patriarchy and sexism and rule out any influence from secular feminism based on the socio-economic and cultural experiences of women. They assert that they are solely recovering the justice of God. While their objective is to affirm a common Christian feminism, this contradicts the central ground upon which secular and Christian feminism is built. The strength of this theological argument is that the Bible sets the direction that all Christians should follow. However, as Fiorenza (1983) and Ruether (1983) have pointed out, the Bible is littered with texts that differentiate men from women and is infused with an ideology of sexism and subordination; thus, appealing to Biblical equality is confusing because the Bible is open to a number of different interpretations and analyses.

In most cases, church women's groups have used aspects of Christian feminism in attempting to understand why women are being marginalised. It is common in the SSEC and ACOM in Small Malaita for women to reflect on selected texts in the Bible to raise their contentions on what they view as unfair. However, at times they are challenged by

certain texts that restrict their movement and conduct in church and society. For example, Ephesians Chapter 5:22-23, which speaks about the submission of Christian wives to their husbands, has always been used to enforce the local *kastom* of marriage rules and women's obedience within the home. In most cases the local churches (especially the SSEC and the ACOM) who opposed women's ordination and leadership have always appealed to the scriptural texts, such as the one from Timothy, that forbid women from exercising pastoral leadership authority, to justify their position.

The persistent male dominance in church leadership, and the apparent ignorance of the significance of women in the church is one of the major concerns of Christian feminism. Christian feminists are of the view that the Bible and Christianity have not accorded women an equal value with men. However, it is evident that theological divisions remain within the global Christian feminist movement. Christian feminists are divided along three main streams. Liberal or radical feminism rejects the patriarchal authority of the Bible but seeks to recover its true meanings. Evangelical feminism recognises the authority of the Bible but grapples with issues of gender equality and leadership and is divided between the egalitarians who believe in equality between men and women, and complementarians who restrict certain leadership roles to men and allow women only complementary roles to male leadership.

Although evangelical feminism is faced with a dilemma, it appeals to strict Biblical equality. Most profoundly, it rejects the departure point of radical and liberal feminism where women's experience of socio-economic and political conditions is a departure point for theorisation. Evangelical feminists appeal for the Biblical equality of men and women in the household of faith, upholding strict adherence to the principle of "Biblical inerrancy". This means the Bible is the absolute word of God. It does not need a scientific interpretation but an outright compliance by faith-practising Christians. The gap between liberal and evangelical feminist theories has not been resolved and it has an impact on gender and power relations affecting the position of women in churches and church leadership. The difference provides a space for analysis in this study.

Colonialism, the Christian Missions and Women

Despite a number of negative consequences resulting from colonialism and Christian missionaries in the rural Solomon Islands, much of the development in the country is

attributed to their influence. For instance, a number of researchers have shown that empowerment and the development of women in terms of education, improved life skills, and social services, were brought about by colonialism and Christian missionaries (Dickson-Waiko, 2003; Paeni, 2003; Tohiana, 2005; Pollard, 2006; Afia-Maetala & Pollard, 2010). However, this argument has been widely challenged by critics of colonialism and Christian missions who have alleged that the structure and forms of development brought about by colonialism and Christian missionaries have resulted in spiritual, cultural and social paradoxes in local communities. Foreign ways of social life have drastically transformed the traditional socio-political and spatial roles of men and women in the local villages and have incorporated Western-Christian cultural assumptions and meanings without empowering women in a manner that is liberating (Grimshaw, 1989; Jolly & Macintyre, 1989; Langmore, 1989; Douglas, 2003; Jolly, 2003; McDougall, 2003; Choi & Jolly, 2014; Latai, 2014).

In a more positive way, writing about Melanesia, particularly 'Are 'Are in Malaita, Alice Pollard (2006) observes that Christian missionaries have helped women in many ways by offering them opportunities for education that consequently led them to assume various male-dominated roles within local communities, government and non-government sectors. Like other missionary organisations, the SSEM has developed the 'Are 'Are women by way of offering basic education and training opportunities to them. Although the initial training was based on basic Christian instructions and Western household management skills, local women have had the opportunity to socialise and share their experience with other women, which gives them confidence to take on some leadership roles in their immediate communities (cf. McDougall, 2003; Scheyvens, 2003).

Similar observations could be drawn from other parts of Melanesia. Tohiana (2005) acknowledges that it was the Catholic Church that provided opportunities for Bougainville women to acquire modern education, enabling them to articulate ideas and to have confidence to speak on socio-economic and political issues that have tended to constrain the lives of women and their communities. McDougall (2003) noted the roles of the United Church in Ranongga, in offering opportunities for women to access modern education and take leadership of their own church work, making the work of the UCWF valued for its efficacy. Likewise, Scheyvens (2003) noted the empowering role of the Catholic Church on Malaita in allowing women to pursue development programmes that in many ways have

challenged the conventional positions of women in local communities. In addition, Dickson-Waiko (2003) highlighted the role of Christianity in providing opportunities for the education of women in Papua New Guinea, enabling a strong bond of socialisation that moves them beyond conventional social and cultural boundaries (Pollard, 2006). These scholars have mostly highlighted the positive roles of Christian missionaries in education in Melanesia.

While the transformative role of colonialism and Christian missions towards women and their place in society is well acknowledged, a number of scholars are sceptical as to whether this transformation has provided an equitable empowerment for women or only created an atmosphere of confusion and dilemma among women and men in their social life. As Jolly and Macintyre (1989) observe in their discussions of colonialism and Christian missionaries:

In charting the transformation of domestic life in the Pacific we must acknowledge the multifaceted and often contradictory pressures which colonialism exerted. Everywhere colonialism had enormous effects, but these were regionally variable and rarely unitary. Rather than presuming the fatal impact of a monolithic colonialism we have tried to scrutinise the complexities of colonial processes. We examine therefore the alienation of land, the appropriation of labour, the introduction of European goods and modes of work, the expansion of colonial states and the influence of Christian missions. This is not to suggest that the 'economic', the 'political' and the 'religious' aspects of colonialism are unrelated. They clearly converge in powerful ways. Christian theology provided justification for some officials and even some labour recruiters who taught they, like the missionaries, were rescuing Pacific peoples from their benighted state of savagery. Christian missionaries imparted not just novel religious notions but new modes of economic and political relation (Jolly & Macintyre, 1989: 3).

The connection between colonialism and Christian missions' engagement with Pacific Islanders is well noted. Pacific Islanders were "benighted at the state of savagery" (Jolly & Macintyre, 1989: 3) and because of that they needed "urgent rescuing" from their own socio-economic and political life. This paternalistic attitude was shared by the colonial government and Christian missions. However, while the colonial and missionary objectives have been achieved, their activities have created a paradoxical dilemma. They strove to liberate women from so-called oppressive cultures that denigrated women but colonialism and missionaries created values that reproduced unequal power relations of Western

domesticity and social life (Jolly & Macintyre, 1989). This paradox is prevalent in many churches in Solomon Islands, mostly in SSEC and ACOM.

Western notions of binary opposition between “public” and “domestic” that are persistent in colonial and Christian Mission discourse, assign women to the ‘domestic realm’ and men to the “public”. This has also been used by Western scholars when theorising gender relations in other parts of the world (Strathern, 1988; Ortner, 1996; Moore, 1998).

The Dilemmas of the Domestic and the Public

The Melanesian conceptualisation of the “domestic” and “public” vary from the Western world resulting in the misunderstanding of cultural spaces (see Strathern, 1988; Moore, 1998). The term domestic is a slippery term, which is used and understood differently (Rosaldo and Lamphere, 1974; Jolly & Macintyre, 1989: 2).

What appears as an acceptable definitional or descriptive use, contrasting domestic and public instance, emerges as inadequate or misleading in another context. It appears exceptional to describe a domestic unit as a group of people who live together in the same dwelling place, who cooperate in producing and consuming food and who conceived of themselves as closely related according to the precepts of kinship and marriage that obtain in that community (Jolly & Macintyre, 1989: 2).

Unlike many industrialised capitalist societies, where there is a clear demarcation between public and domestic life, it is difficult to locate domestic life in Melanesia, where men and even women are not really confined to household settings as in the modern Western sense. Men may sleep together and socialise in a men’s house, while women and children live in the common family home. However, the male lifestyle is not bounded or fixed. Men could always return to the home to perform their domestic responsibilities (Jolly & Macintyre, 1989).

Despite the varying notions of space in Melanesian and Western cultures, concerning domestic and public, household and family, it is normal for men to acquire higher level leadership positions and power compared with women. However, in some parts of Melanesia, women have taken public roles. As McDougall (2014) has stated, certain women of chiefly clans in Ranongga, a matrilineal community, in the Western Solomon Islands have become chiefs and inherited their brothers’ chiefly authority. In ‘Are‘Are, Pollard (2006) reported that ‘Are‘Are women performed important leadership roles in their respective local communities. Women were not only confined to the preparation of food

for feasts but took part in discussions, planning and managing the mortuary feasts. In Kwaio, Keesing (1989) cited the important roles women played in preparation for mortuary feasts in honour of their deceased husbands. In such contexts the widow fed pigs and managed the feast to reciprocate the assistance provided to her during the funeral ceremony of her husband. However, in the Melanesian context, such functions are necessary to subordinate male leadership in family, clans and tribes to enable social cohesiveness.

Home & Womanhood

With the vision of salvaging the exotic uncivilised “heathens”, Western and European colonialism and Christian missions have played a transforming role in Pacific societies, especially in terms of “home” and “womanhood”. Their views have changed the model of womanhood and transformed the roles women play in the home and in local societies. Patricia Grimshaw (1989), writing about the incursion of American missionary wives in the 1800s among Hawai‘ian women, argues that this introduced them to the more complex socio-economic life of the industrialised West, especially the notions of family and of femininity. With the introduction of mills and factories, the integrated household economy of local agriculture changed, and men became the breadwinners while women became housekeepers. Although this model has changed in Solomon Islands, mostly in urban centres and in the city, a good number of families, have seen men being the breadwinner through their paid employment (cf. Grimshaw, 1989:21-22; Macintyre, 1989; Dureau, 1993). Indeed, this has influenced Pacific domestic livelihood and gender roles.

With the strong influence of Christian missions, the idea of family and womanhood has become a strong platform for the configuration of Christian space, providing new ideals of ‘femininity’ to fit a new Christian family model of domesticity. Coupled with the Western industrialised socio-economic life, there is a strong emphasis on a model of motherhood that appears as the “cult of womanhood which demands piety, purity, submission, and domesticity” (Grimshaw, 1989: 22). Missionaries in the twentieth century believed that the introduction of Christianity helped improve women’s lives, which gave them capacity to contribute to the mission of the church (Grimshaw, 1983; Ralston, 1989: 48). These combined objectives led missionaries to promote a new model of womanhood quite different from traditional feminine roles, combining a Western domestic model of womanhood with a Christian framework.

A similar mode of Euro-Christian domestication of women had been implemented in girls' mission schools such as Pamua, Bungana and Tasia in Solomon Islands. Today the trend continues. In ACOM, both its three schools of theology and ministry (STM)⁴⁴ and BPTC, Kohimarama, continue with the missionary legacy of training priests' wives, based on Christian teaching but with more emphasis on household skills, such as cooking, sewing, floral art, and basic home management and economics (BPTC *Handbook*, 2012: 45; cf. also see Latu, 2014). A review of the SSEC syllabus has also shown that the Women's Bible College at Afio on Small Malaita had a similar teaching syllabus for women and girls. The Bible lessons are heavily supplemented by household management and home economics (Griffiths, 1977).

While the missionary training of women focused on Christian mission contexts, the colonial government emphasised the teaching of household management and home economics in girls' schools. In a conference on girls' education organised by the Women's Education Officer of the British Solomon Islands Protectorate (BSIP) in 1961 for all headmistresses of mission girls' schools in Solomon Islands, the roles of the women in home economics and management were emphasised:

In any developing country the training of girls in habits and skills which help them become better citizens, wives, and mothers is an important factor in the progress of that country. In Solomon Islands where because of isolation there is little to stimulate progress or arouse ambitions towards a better way of living, where, too, the girls still marry very young, the earlier this training can become the better (BSIP *Conference Report on Girls' Education*, 1961: 2).

This emphasis has played an influential role in Solomon Islands education system both in government and church schools and institutions. In secondary schools, home economics courses were taught as an elective subject. In most cases, only girls were encouraged to enrol. In non-formal education sectors, rural training centres and other women's groups, including church organisations, they have taken on home management programmes and home economic courses such as sewing, stitching and crotchet, cooking, and floral arrangement. In church women's groups, the training in such skills is included in ongoing

⁴⁴ ACOM has three Schools of Theology and Ministry (STM) since 2012. They are Trinity STM, Diocese of Malaita, Mano Wadrokai STM, Diocese of Ysabel, and Fisher Young STM, in the Diocese of Banks & Torres, in the Republic of Vanuatu. The schools offer diplomas and certificates in theological studies, and mainly prepare men for ordination to the priesthood. Married students (men) are obliged to attend school with their wives so that they will be trained with skills to support their husband's ministries. BPTC, Kohimarama, offers a Bachelor of Theology programme for priests who have served in the church and wanted further training.

church activities of Bible studies and prayers, testimonies, fellowship sharing, mission outreach and singing.

Christian Sacred Space

The mission pattern of reconfiguration of sacred space is well documented in recent research. For example, Jolly's (1989) studies of South Pentecost highlighted that while Christian conversion introduced Western civilisation, missionaries moved further to reform and break down patterns of gender segregation basic to indigenous religion, and replaced them with a Christian model of separate spheres for women and men (Jolly, 1989: 223). On Pentecost (Vanuatu), Jolly (1989) argues that gender relations and gender segregation in Vanuatu is not permanently set but fluidly organised around the social needs and livelihood of the family. Men, for example, have not always confined themselves to the men's house, *mal*, but always return to the *im*, the household to socialise with the family and perform household duties. On the other hand, women have always taken part in public ceremonies and rituals such as marriages, circumcisions, death, grade-taking and mortuary feastings (Jolly, 1989; see also, Keesing, 1989; Pollard, 2006, for further discussion elsewhere). Melanesian gender relations and segregation makes clear distinctions parallel to the Western notion of domestic and public spaces. Although some Western political institutions and even the church appear to resemble the male segregated houses in Melanesia, the men's house is not an overarching public institution, even if like the church and parliament, it seems to be outside of it (Jolly, 1989:222).

Christianity has had a double impact on gender relations and segregation through its ongoing missionary work, in offering meaning to women's lives. Jolly describes how,

The separate spheres of the Christian religion not only radically divided the lives of women and men like those of the ancestral religion, but also introduced a division between public and domestic, and sacred and secular aspects of existence. The old forms of gender segregation were attacked, often on the grounds that they were demeaning to women. But the Christian churches often presented new models of segregation and ones which did not necessarily confer on women the powers they enjoyed in ancestral religion. The ancestral religion, like Christianity, was male dominated, but in so far as its central values entailed the sacralisation of domestic life and of human kinship, women's working and reproductive capacities were crucial (Jolly, 1989: 233).

It is evident therefore, that in removing the old forms of gender segregation and in offering Christian models, women lost the power and privileges of participating in community life.

Women are segregated from men to perform household roles such as sewing to clothe the family, cooking to feed the family and managing the home and welfare of the community. In these terms, Christianity has not advanced their work, but widened the gap in gender relations in terms of participation in church evangelisation and leadership. Women usually remain domestic supporters and auxiliaries to men (Langmore, 1989). A typical example can be found in the training of women in the Melanesian Mission. Men were trained for church leadership such as catechists and priests, while women were offered a well-designed syllabus that introduced them to the role of Christian wives (Hilliard, 1974; Jolly, 1989; Langmore, 1989; Pollard, 2006).

The Role of Women in Leadership

While it is claimed that Christianity and colonialism have strengthened the role of women in leadership in church and society, other research challenges this perspective. For instance, Douglas (2003) observes that in some Melanesian societies, especially in Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, and Papua New Guinea, women are powerful, and men are fearful of their reproductive capacities which were believed to have a weakening and polluting power during the women's menstruation period and childbirth (see Maranda, 1974; Keesing, 1982; Burt, 1994). In some matrilineal cultures, certain women assumed more socio-economic and political power than men, especially in connection to land ownership. However, these powers appear to have been compromised by male kin.

Furthermore, while religious duties and leadership in the Pacific and in Melanesia are deemed the domain of men (see Forman, 1984), women have assumed parallel religious duties as well. For instance, among the Nagovisi in Bougainville, women with the high rank of chief's titles used to perform rituals on behalf of their family (Pollard, 2006: 22). Also, in the recent past in some parts of Small Malaita, women priests used to perform purification rituals on women who had just given birth to restore them to a state of *mola* or ordinary life in order to enable them to be received back into the household and the community (Wate, 2013; see also, Pollard, 2006).

McDougall (2014) argues that Ranongga women of chiefly clans assumed leadership roles and were respected in their local cultural communities. However, the Christian missions and colonialism assumed that leadership roles were the domain of men and not of women. She argues that there was general reluctance among the Christian missions and colonial

officers to record women's leadership roles in their societies. Unlike the case of Solomon Islands, in Fiji some women assumed chiefly titles and their authority remained prominent in their local communities throughout the country. For instance, Adi Kuini Speed, a political leader of the multi-ethnic Fiji Labour Party and later the indigenous Fiji Party inherited a chiefly title (Leckie, 2002) from her tribe. While more hierarchical societies such as Fiji have continued to maintain women as chiefs, in Solomon Islands these roles gradually ceased with the influence of Christianity and colonialism.

Christian Women's Sociality

Women's sociality was the result of Christian missionaries' work among women (Forman, 1984; Douglas, 2002). Douglas (2002) noted that before the arrival of missionaries such social interaction among women could not be possible due to cultural restrictions, and furthermore, the fact that local village settlements were distant from each other.

In Solomon Islands, over two thousand church women's groups were established among the mainstream churches, such as the Anglican Church of Melanesia, Roman Catholic Church, South Sea Evangelical Church, and the Seventh day Adventist Church (Pollard, 2003, 2006). In analysing women's roles in churches in the Pacific, Forman (1984) noted their importance in leadership and congregations. Clergy wives had supportive roles in helping their husband's ministry. Catholic priests were unmarried and thus they presented a leadership that was male-dominated. Forman (1984) observed that as the churches grew, men continued to control leadership, while missionaries' wives had no formal leadership roles and were not ordained to perform missionary duties.

Forman (1984) argued that alternative roles of participation developed through local women's groups which could meet weekly in fellowship for prayer. This occurs in Solomon Islands, for example in the South Sea Evangelical Church, which, although founded by a woman, Florence Young, developed a male model of leadership which controlled the church. Missionary wives had engaged in providing supporting ministry for their husbands, helping create women's "bands"⁴⁵ as models of Christian socialisation with other local women.

⁴⁵ The name "Women's Band" had replaced the initial name *Fiku ana kini*, Kwaraa'e language words for a 'group of women'. *Fiku* means a group or fellowship, *ana* of, *kini*, women. The name was first used for the group of women, mostly student's wives who attended Onepusu Bible College with their husbands in the

In contrast to other local Christian women's organisations, the Melanesian Mission introduced a model of women's organisations from England. The Mothers' Union, a Christian women's organisation, started in the 1880s by the wife of a Church of England Vicar, was introduced in the Anglican communities in the 1900s. Its role focuses on providing a space for women to socialise and gather in fellowship, and it introduced a model of Christian domestic work for nurturing families (Mothers' Union Handbook, 2009). The model of organisation and its objectives reflected a colonial model of womanhood nurtured in Britain.

Colonial Model of Womanhood

Colonial models of womanhood focused on a commitment to middle-class English household protocols, women behaving as good wives coupled with modesty in clothing and body ornamentation. The beauty of the domestic home, both internal and external, its environment, its manners and protocols promoted the dignity and prestige of husbands and fathers. The home was thought to mirror a good husband through the agency of a good wife. Although it has been seen as a platform for development and leadership as argued by Pollard (2003; 2006; also see, Scheyvens, 2003), these models of alternative participation seem to have reinforced the colonial and Christian models of womanhood.

Although colonialism and Christian missions have brought about positive transformations for women in terms of contemporary educational opportunities, and created new forms of sociality for women to allow them freedom to share new ideas, they have contributed to new forms of identity that can be burdensome for women, especially those in the rural communities. Being encoded with the identity of Christian womanhood, women are confined to the domestic sphere to maintain the Christian virtues and colonial protocols, introducing new forms of exclusion from public roles. Both men and women seem permanently confined to Christian gender spaces where men can attain leadership roles, while women remain in subordinate roles, pushed back to domestic roles to assume leadership exclusively within the household setting.

1930s. The group began by learning new household skills, and later learned Bible teachings and became active in personal witness and local evangelism.

Women's Empowerment and Leadership

Empowerment has been a popular discourse in feminist anthropology. Although it began earlier, it became prominent in the 1960s and 1970s (Strathern, 1988; Moore, 1998; McCann & Kim 2003; Parpart, 2004; Parpart, Rai, & Staudt, 2007). It is “goal oriented, a state of confidence worthy of self-competence. A condition that provides people to achieve power” (Itzhaky & York, 2000: 225). Later empowerment theory considers powerlessness and the oppression of those without social, political and economic equity and seeks suitable theoretical bases and practice to eradicate these conditions (Pease, 2002; Parpart, 2004; Parpart et al., 2004).

Women's empowerment addresses the “politics of difference” (Moore, 1998; Mehra, 1997), asserting men as powerful and women as submissive. Empowerment from this perspective is theorised as a process of “extending the capacity of women beyond the domestic to the public sphere to certain rights accorded to the male” (Rowland-Serdar & Schwartz-Shea, 1991:605). In this context, empowerment entails a wide range of activities, including the formation of women's groups, the creation of development policies, and constitutional amendments at every level of governance that attempt to improve the socio-economic and political livelihood of women (see Scheyvens, 1999). It also creates a robust psychology that gives women confidence in themselves to act even in constraining circumstances. Furthermore, it expands choice for women to improve their lives (Mehra, 1997:138).

Theories of Empowerment, Leadership, and Powerlessness

Empowerment theories address the basic questions of powerlessness and oppression. They are multi-dimensional, whether collective or individual, designed to suit specific needs and contexts. For instance, Itzhaky and York (2000) citing Zimmerman's (1990a) work argue that “psychological empowerment” (Itzhaky and York, 2000:225) refers to individuals and their ability to cope, but does not ignore ecological, cultural, and structural influences. This includes motivation and self-efficacy and puts them in ecological and cultural contexts. Solomon (1976) pushed this further by defining empowerment as the “removal of blocks to power” (Itzhaky and York, 2000:225 quoting Solomon's work), while Perkins and Zimmerman (1995) observe “empowerment as a process by which people gain control over their lives, democratic participation in the life of their community, and a critical understanding of their environment” (Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995:570). Zimmerman and

Rappaport (1988) further observe that there is a strong relationship between community involvement and participation as a measure of psychological empowerment.

Although these studies have suggested different ways and forms of empowerment, in general they appear to be underscoring a particular phenomenon underlying these definitions. Empowerment is an ability to cope psychologically with confidence and self-worth in one's ecological, cultural, structural setting. It is a self-realisation of the removal of "blocks" that disempower the human actor. This may entail cultural, socio-economic, political and religious structures that obstruct power and self-confidence. Empowerment is a multifaceted phenomenon in a specific context. This has led this study to enquire as to the current state and condition of women in Solomon Islands, especially in church settings. The form of the empowerment proposed will be determined by the nature and character of oppression and powerlessness they suffer. Appropriate empowerment is identified through a process of analysis and assumes many distinctive forms which depend on social organisation (Bird, 2006:391).

But how does power operate in gender relations? Yoder and Kahn (1992) suggest that power is sought differently according to gender. "Women seek power to", that is personal empowerment, whereas men frequently look for "power over", that is, domination and control (Itzhaky & York, 2000: 227, quoting Yoder & Kahn, 1992). In a similar vein, quoting Dixon's (1993) work, Itzhaky and York (2000: 227) write that "women's groups and organisations too frequently sidestep power relations at the political level, preferring an inward looking for 'power on'. This has implied a more exclusive approach whereby women seek power to concentrate on internal interests, and things considered as important 'to me' in their groups, families, and communities.

Forms of Empowerment

Notions of empowerment vary according to context and situation. However, fundamental to the need of empowerment is a situation of "powerlessness", a state in which social actors are deprived in a given cultural and socio-economic and political context. Measures for empowerment can be disempowering and oppressive if the need and context are not well understood. Therefore, it is necessary to enquire whether the women in Christian communities in Solomon Islands, particularly among the SSEC and the ACOM, are powerless and require empowerment, and if they are powerless, what forms of empowerment are needed, and at what point does the empowerment process begin?

Dynamics of Empowerment

Chandra Mohanty (1991) observes that all feminist theories take the West as the norm for empowerment. Central to Western feminism is the need to locate the individual self, the woman, at the centre of empowerment. Empowerment in this context moves the woman beyond the cultural norms, the political, social and economic structures of society, and the biological differences in order to claim the right of equality. Politically, empowerment rejects patriarchal authority and constructs the notion of right to equate a balance and remove differences of cultural, social and biological orientation. However, while this model of empowerment proposes to liberate the individual woman from oppression, it has been criticised for not situating empowerment within a proper understanding of the historical self. For instance, following Evans (1986), Rowland-Serdar & Schwartz-Shea (1991: 605) argue that “liberal feminism cannot advance the feminist cause”. They argue that feminists share a common concern with liberal feminism in the struggle against the systematic subordination of women in public and domestic spaces. They recommend a “revitalisation” of liberal feminism by examining empowerment in relation to the foundation of women’s powerlessness in the domestic sphere. They further suggest that women can move from “powerlessness” to empowerment by reclaiming the stories of their lives (Rowland-Serdar & Schwartz-Shea, 1991:605). This is one of the significant points that this study advances. There have been concerns about women’s subordination in leadership. In most cases, local women have experienced unequal participation in decision-making, and felt discriminated against by men, both in local churches and societies (Pollard, 2006). The major question of this research is to explore the underlying factors that give rise to this state of powerlessness and dis-empowerment.

For liberal feminism, “empowerment has meant extending the options of women beyond the domestic to the public sphere” (Rowland-Serdar & Schwartz-Shea, 1991: 605). This accords individual woman certain rights assumed by men. The vehicle of empowerment is through legal and constitutional action. Here I enquire whether women in Solomon Islands, and particularly members of the SSEC Women’s Fellowship and the Mothers’ Union, can truly realise a deeper sense of empowerment through state and church policies to legislate for gender equality and equal participation of women in decision-making bodies and committees.

Empowerment ought to be a transformative process. Jane Parpart, Shirin Rai and Kathleen Staudt (2004:1) have noted the conflicting interests and notions of power and empowerment in relation to women's rights, agency, and empowerment. Given the political and cultural diversity of feminist approaches, the complication could remain visibly unaddressed. Black and Third World feminists take a different approach. To these scholars, "participation is central to empowerment" (Parpart et al., 2007:4). It is a two-way process. While participation challenges dominant structures, it also contributes to self-awareness in both private and public life. Change can also occur in the private and personal space of an individual woman's consciousness, which is empowering (Collins, 1991:111). However, Parpart et al. (2007) argue that if women are to be successful in addressing the gender hierarchy, women must rise over the old notion of "*power over* people and resources" (Parpart et al., 2007:4). Power ought to be situated in the centre. They argue that "empowerment is both a process and outcome" and warn against the practice of measuring empowerment in terms of outcomes rather than theorising it as an ongoing process. They hold that empowerment ought to recapture the feminist interpretation of power and centralise power as the basis for women's empowerment. This approach entails challenging institutional structures that embrace inequality and a sexist culture. Parpart's (2004) theoretical stance is partly relevant to the local church women's group context. Local church women continually engage in transformative programmes that focus on notions of indigenous sociality. Achievements are celebrated in the midst of the ongoing process. Unlike secular organisations, church women's groups have visualised and embraced God's power – the Holy Spirit – (regarded as master) as central to their empowerment goals and processes.

Michael Foucault (1979; 1991) observes that power is relational and does not locate itself in an institution, individual groups, but is fluid and at work in actions. Power exists and is expressed in the everyday relationships of people, individually and in institutions. In the political scenario, Foucault (1979) recognises that power can be used to disempower and at the same time inspire resistance. Foucault has raised an important point considering women's empowerment in the Melanesian church context. While power or empowerment is theorised as a "commodity" or something done to people, or that people do to others" (Pease, 2002: 135-137), to Foucault, power is relationally embedded in people's action. It is action- oriented and fluid.

It is increasingly common in Solomon Islands among government and churches, especially the ACOM, to legislate for the equal participation of women in membership in various church boards and committees (see *ACOM Manual*, 2014). Currently the ACOM has agreed to the ordination of women to become priests and leaders within the church. While the empowerment of women is being advanced with some profound Biblical and theological underpinnings, there have been clear indications that, like the government, NGOs, human rights and feminist movements, the church continues to struggle and advocate for the rights of women to gender equality and empowerment.

Rowland-Serdar & Schwartz-Shea (1999) conclude by suggesting a move beyond the claim to rights, and they ground feminism in foundational issues of selfhood and self-definition. The experience of many women since the 1970s and the 1980s has shown that gaining equal legal constitutional rights and access to previously male-dominated arenas is not the equivalent of empowerment for women. The fact that women have crossed the barrier from domestic to public spheres is like a “double-day” of work. The juggling of childcare, outside work, and other formal engagement is an onerous burden for women. As Serdar and Shea put it, “it appears that the one type of subjugation has merely exchanged with another” (Rowland-Serdar & Schwartz-Shea, 1991: 606). The “ambivalence of women themselves toward feminism reflects not only confusion about the value of equal opportunity, but has demonstrated women’s doubts about their own power to shape their lives in either public or domestic arenas” (Rowland-Serdar & Schwartz-Shea, 1991:606). Rowland-Serdar & Schwartz-Shea’s critique of liberal feminism and the call for revitalisation to ground feminism in women’s personal stories, provides a conducive context for this study.

Women’s Empowerment in Solomon Islands

Women’s empowerment in Solomon Islands is complicated and enmeshed with dilemmas. It has a range of approaches and entails various activities. For instance, Economic empowerment of women is also viewed as a significant step in liberating women from oppression and taking control of their lives (Misra, 2006; Dralega, 2007). A number of studies conducted in Solomon Islands by overseas agencies and researchers have shown that women are economically powerless to make decisions or participate fully in community life. The *JICA Country Gender Profile: Solomon Islands Report* (2010) has criticised the government, overseas agencies and NGOs for focusing too much on women’s

empowerment, domestic violence, and participation in politics and governance. It alleges that less attention and support has always been given to economic empowerment and livelihood improvements for women in agriculture and fisheries, education and health in rural areas (JICA report, 2010: 35).

While economic empowerment has been theorised by overseas agencies (for example United Nations, 2015; DEFAT, 2016) as an effective pathway to alleviate powerlessness and increase the capacity of local women to attain economic prosperity and increase freedom, recent studies have shown that economic empowerment in urban centres and rural villages does not always achieve the desired goals of empowerment (Macintyre, 2014; Eves & Crawford, 2014; Eves et al., 2017). A study conducted by *Do No Harm Research* in 2017, in Solomon Islands among rural women's savings clubs on Makira, and West 'Are'Are has shown that rural women's engagement in savings clubs have facilitated participation in decision-making and confidence in public speaking, and has helped support family needs and/or children's education. In contrast, women have also increased burdens on themselves and become entangled in other social, cultural and family conflicts (*Do No Harm Research* Solomon Islands, 2017:9-56).

While some claim, however, that economic empowerment must come from outside of the government, NGOs and foreign government agencies, there is a sense of reservation among women elites. Pollard (2003), writing about the women's organisations in Solomon Islands, highlights women's ability in management and organisation, arguing that these skills are innate in women. In everyday life, they support families by providing food from their own gardens, necessary support for the livelihood of their kin (Pollard, 2003:44). Pollard argues that many women's organisations in Solomon Islands survived economically, despite a lack of financial assistance from both government and foreign agencies during the ethnic conflict in the country from 1998 to 2003. She highlights the self-financing *Rokotanikeni* (union of women) women's organisation in her own area in 'Are'Are on South Malaita as a justification for her argument. However, while Pollard (2003) believes that volunteerism and self-support, and an appropriate economic development framework are sustainable for local women, in some cases, certain women's groups which are either self- or externally supported, have always encountered challenges of mistrust, jealousy, personal hatred and gossip. In most cases these influences have undermined the progress of women's groups (Pollard, 2003; Eves et al., 2017; also see Dickson-Waiko, 2003).

Women's empowerment has also been discussed within the broad perspective of social development. Research reports have cited the importance of social development in terms of health, education, gender equality and women's security. Solomon Islands Country report (2012) has revealed that women always have health problems because they are heavily burdened with childcare, domestic duties and gardening, yet do not have reasonable access to health centres and clinics. In other instances, while women could afford to seek health services in proximate vicinities, there are insufficient medical supplies to meet their needs. Education for girls in primary, secondary and tertiary institutions lacks equal enrolment. Girls have always had a lower enrolment rate in these institutions (MEHD report, 2008). In the informal sector, women have less opportunity to access skills training to expand their capacity for social and economic development. Women are often seen as bystanders or spectators for education opportunities. This has brought about unequal participation of women in decision-making in community leadership.

Church Women's groups and Empowerment

Literature on women's empowerment in church organisations has shown that women have engaged in empowerment activities and are eager to strive against social and religious marginalisation (Scheyvens, 2003). This has come about even though women are unsure about whether or not their programmes meet the Western concept of empowerment. In the study conducted by Scheyvens (2003), she stated that human geographers, economists and social development agencies have long been measuring development in terms of a binary distinction between "empowerment and welfare" (see Scheyvens, 2003: 26, 38-39). Their interest provides clear evidence of empowerment and consistent programmes of action. This has been set out in the criteria and policies governing their funding support. Because of their religious nature, church women's groups have been considered as "passive beneficiaries rather than active agents of change" (Scheyvens, 2003: 26), so their programmes and activities have not always been considered for funding. The belief that church women's groups mainly focus on domestic welfare activities such as cooking, sewing and handicrafts, maternal and childcare rather than empowerment activities, contributed to them being disqualified from funding support by overseas funding agencies (Douglas, 2003; Jolly, 2003; Pollard, 2003; McDougall, 2003; Scheyvens, 2003:26); although, as Douglas (2003) shows, these activities provide sites of empowerment for women.

However, church women's groups are not spectators of empowerment and development but empower themselves using their own resources and identity. In her studies of church women's groups in Solomon Islands, on Malaita, Guadalcanal, Ysabel and Western provinces, Scheyvens (2003) asserts that women in these church settings have long been engaged in empowerment that appears as domestic welfare activities. Although all their programmes and activities are structured and defined by their respective church denominations, women often expand the programmes beyond the given guidelines, depending on emerging needs and experience. In some cases, these programmes are not necessarily approved by their respective churches. Scheyvens noted this gradual change:

Gradually, however, there has been a move away from this conservative stance as running Mothers' Union at the national level have taken a fairly liberal interpretation of their objective... This shift in attitude was evident in the 1970s with the introduction of health and sanitation projects, in the early 1980s with the start of village kindergartens run by local women, and in the late 1980s with the initiative of literacy programmes. Besides launching into non-formal education programmes, the Mothers Union has shown more concern for political issues, particularly logging (Scheyvens, 2003:35).

Christian Spirituality & Empowerment

Studies on the Christian missionary domestication of women and homes in the Pacific have shown that women were not only taught Western domestic activities such as, cooking, sewing and handcrafts but they were also taught Bible studies and reading (Jolly, 1989; Douglas, 2003; Choi & Jolly, 2014). With the formation of church women's groups, these skills of Bible knowledge have been transformed into powerful tools for rethinking women's roles and primary mission within their churches, communities and homes. Women's groups began in the early missionary days as Bible study and prayer groups within particular churches but later took on domestic roles to support the demands of the new Christian home environment (Jolly & Macintyre, 1989; Douglas, 2003; McDougall, 2003).

Furthermore, empowerment does not build on women's experiences alone, but it can be gained through fellowship and the simple interpretations of the Bible texts, and personal life sharing, something which is often found in church women's groups. As Dickson-Waiko (2003) writes, "women's fellowship meetings are not only times for hymn singing and praying but also sharing" (2003: 110):

Fellowship meetings can thus serve as a form of consciousness-raising, but it is important not to rationalise away their religious aspects since they also strengthen women's faith. Just for a moment, problems are placed in God's hands. Women pray and help with practical difficulties such as unemployed husbands and children and many would insist that their prayers are answered. It is itself liberating... The Bible studies touch the very core of the difficulties women experience and encourage discussion through which various tensions and frustrations are released (Dickson-Waiko, 2003: 111).

Women were not merely engaged in empowerment activities but first reflected on the Christian meanings of their roles in the fellowship group. They often did this by identifying themselves with certain powerful gendered images in the Bible. McDougall (2003) for instance, asserts that in the late 1990s and the early 2000s (see below), the Honiara-based women's group that stood up for peace in June 2000 amidst the ethnic conflict was empowered by a Christian ideology and practice of fellowship (McDougall, 2003: 62):

The relationship between women and Christian love was mostly articulated during a 1999 Easter Bible study that I attended in Pienuna. The study question asked why did a woman (Mary Magdalene) first witness the resurrection of Jesus, instead of one of his male disciples? Some participants explained that the mourning women in Bethlehem [Jerusalem] could not forget their grief and could not leave the grave of Jesus. Others argued that although women are naturally weaker than men, their love empowered them so that they did not flee from the persecution like Jesus's male disciples did (McDougall, 2003:67).

The text presents a scenario of maternal love which is empowered with Christian meaning. Mary Magdalene was not the mother of Jesus. It was her personal conviction of a relationship with Jesus that empowered her to overcome fear and to be present at his crucifixion. Such personal Christian ideological interpretations can bring about special meanings that empower women to engage in critical issues in both church and society. The Ranongga UCWF as presented by McDougall engaged in such empowerment in accomplishing their vision of a new Christian world order – the creation of one people under God (McDougall, 2003:67).

In June 2000, the Honiara Women for Peace were empowered spiritually to accomplish their mission to broker peace during the ethnic conflict. From 1998 to 2003, an ethnic war broke out in Solomon Islands between the Guadalcanal militia, and the Guadalcanal Revolutionary Army (GRA) and the Malaita Eagle Force (MEF). As a result, all the important social services, including health and medical services collapsed and the schools were frequently closed because teachers were not paid. But most importantly, the law and

order situation had deteriorated, and people were brought under the control of various militia groups. Although police officers were around, they were powerless. Furthermore local police were not trusted because some of them took sides with specific militias.

In articulating the symbol of motherhood, women from various churches were drawn within the spiritual atmosphere of prayer, the singing of spiritual songs, and reflections that eventually gave them the zeal to advance their mission (Pollard, 2003). Women were not only passionate about being women, but also critically reflected on their Christian obligation to the nation as mothers and, despite their various church differences, they were drawn together to perform their responsibilities and broker peace. As Dickson-Waiko (2003) puts it, “women are liberated through their confession that Jesus is Lord and saviour” (2003:110).

Women’s Sociality and Empowerment

Local women in Solomon Islands are said to feel powerless and bored when staying at home for too long by themselves but are personally empowered whenever they met in fellowship with other women, either in their own groups, or in ecumenical gatherings (Dickson-Waiko, 2003; Paini, 2003; Pollard, 2003; Scheyvens, 2003). Empowerment is realised through social mobilisation, changing the state of mind and behaviour to access social power as a collective process (Misra, 2006:872).

Scheyvens (2003) observes that most local women in Solomon Islands are delighted and feel good in going to meet other women. Exchanging views and sharing skills and learning new ones from other women has proved beneficial to women. Engagement in fundraising for churches, and taking care of church visitors, including church ministers during church gatherings, is not seen as a burden, but as a space in which church women gather to engage in women’s activities that are liberating (see McDougall, 2003; Erickson, 2006). While on one hand, it is observed that these social and religious activities have always created avenues of feeling good and are beneficial for the local church women when exchanging views, on the other hand, these activities have not removed the burdens and structural constraints that women face. On returning to their homes, women always find that the structural burden and constraints of the home are always there.

Cultural Symbols and Empowerment

Cultural symbols and meanings have paved the way for personal and collective empowerment in Melanesia. Some ethnographic research (Paini, 2003; Pollard, 2003) has shown how women have used the symbol of motherhood to deal with the social and political issues affecting women and their communities. For example, Paini (2003) noted how the Druelu women on Lifou in New Caledonia have claimed their womanhood and motherhood as like that of a *ka xet*, a young undamaged banana leaf used to wrap and tie the local dish *itra* when prepared for cooking in an earth oven, which remains intact even after baking. Women are likened to the young banana leaf which keeps the food together and they are '*Ame la foe ka xet ne hnalapa*' meaning that they are the ones who keep the household together. They are also *trenge la mel* (the basket of life)" (Paini, 2003: 85).

The cultural symbol of motherhood has been used to encompass political ideology in Solomon Islands. For instance, Pollard (2003) noted the Honiara Women for Peace group walked between the warring parties in June 2000 to appeal for peace. It was their collective identity as mothers that empowered them to drive through with a firm belief that the warring parties would know the cultural significance of the message of peace and the importance of motherhood. McDougall (2003) noted the similar empowering symbol of motherhood in her studies of the Ranongga UCWF. In pre-Christian times, women as mothers engaged in saving the lives of captured enemies and adopted them into their respective tribes.

While this cultural metaphor of motherhood is thought of as empowering, in another sense it gives the impression of embracing the home and family. Thus, Ram and Jolly (1998) noted that most women in Western liberal societies do not consider the symbol of motherhood as an empowering metaphor. However, as Misra (2006:872) cautions, "empowerment has myriad nuances. It suggests more than it tells". The metaphor of motherhood may not be empowering to women in other parts of the world, but it is empowering in the context of Melanesian culture.

Conclusion

Women's empowerment draws on the liberating concept that women in subordinate conditions should take control of their own lives and destiny rather remaining marginalised. The discussion has shown that women's empowerment, according to radical and liberal feminist theory, entails encouraging women to stand up to claim human rights through legal

institutions. But others have suggested an alternative approach beginning by reclaiming the self and the women's story from the personal level.

In Solomon Islands, the departure point for women's empowerment is at odds with so many objectives of empowerment. At the national level, elite women vie for political and constitutional empowerment while others seek economic empowerment. This research focuses on women's empowerment in the church setting. The literature on church women's groups has highlighted three forms of empowerment as necessary for women that are spiritual, social, and cultural.

Gender relations in Melanesia and particularly in church contexts remain unequal. Leadership and decision-making is dominated by men, while women play subordinate roles. Although women are found to be leaders in other parts of their respective communities and societies, their leadership is informal compared to the leadership of men, which is formal and standardised. In certain cultural groups women from chiefly clans assumed power as chiefs, and women performed certain political roles such as planning and organising feasts, yet with rapid social change, these roles have gradually declined and disappeared.

Christianity has not produced a consistent understanding of women's roles in the church and community. The division between liberal and evangelical feminists has influenced Christianity in Solomon Islands and has created contradictions, discrepancies and uncertainties that have led to gender inequality in leadership and participation in church life.

The roles of colonialism and Christian missions in the transformation of traditional gender roles are well documented. While they brought about a new form of sociality to women that led to a certain emphasis on freedom, they also resulted in a new social condition that discriminated against women and pushed them further into domestic spaces that were burdened by a colonial model of womanhood derived from the culture of the emergent Western middle class.

Empowerment by contrast, is not a distant goal but a process in the making. Women in Solomon Islands have long been engaged to empower activities that often help to liberate

and transform their lives. The forms of empowerment that women can adopt depend on the nature and context of their needs. As far as church women's groups are concerned, empowerment has to take forms that are appropriate and meaningful in their new context.

Generally, in the context of Solomon Islands Christianity, women have not yet achieved a clear mandate for leadership in the church context, although in rhetorical terms there have been expressions of equality using indigenous and Christian language and metaphors. This occurs among all churches, whether evangelical or Catholic in tradition.

Chapter 6: Gender Relations in the SSEC Church Women's Fellowship and the ACOM Mothers' Union on Small Malaita

Introduction

Local culture, influenced by colonialism and Christian missionary ideals of domesticities and womanhood, has given rise to a hybridised model of socio-Christian order of womanhood in Small Malaitan Christianity (cf. Burt, 1994; Choi & Jolly, 2014). Local women's reading and theorisation of the Bible especially the Genesis narrative of the creation account of Eve, (the first woman) out from Adam's ribs, juxtaposed with Pauline theology and instructions regarding the position of Christian wives in the household in relation to their roles and responsibilities to their husbands and children, has reinforced justification for local women church's subordinate position in the household and also within the church social setting (see, Jolly, 1996:178-178). Nevertheless, paradoxically, in the course of living within this distinct complexity, local church women have continued to exert empowerment and self-emancipation subscribing to cultural and Biblical frameworks.

This chapter describes the church women's experiences in their church communities. It provides various accounts about how women were viewed in their respective church communities when they aspired to take leadership and the challenges they face as members of the church women's groups as well as Christian wives. The chapter begins with my observation of the role that singing plays in the life of the women I visited in Small Malaita, and how it provides a space for creative agency while navigating Christian ethics and church hierarchies.

Small Malaita Women, *The Singing Women*: A Personal Observation Account

One of the important components of the church women's groups in Small Malaita is the art of singing choruses and gospel songs. These songs are mostly emotional, inspiring self- uplifting and self-reflection. In many cases they take the form of personal testimonies. I want to reflect on this, especially in relation to the SSEC villages where singing of choruses is an important part of their lives.

During my fieldwork, I noticed an important feature of church women's group in Small Malaita, not quite popular among the Mothers' Union, but very popular with the SSEC

Women's Fellowship groups. It is singing of inspired choruses and gospel songs. No meetings would be held without these choruses being sung and at various points relevant actions accompanied the songs to explain the meaning of the words. In every village I visited, the opening and closing of meetings with the women were marked by rhythmic spiritual choruses and songs, repeatedly sung, more and more loudly and enthusiastically. Women would arrive in different moods, but as they began singing this changed as they became more peaceful and confident. Most of the songs were locally composed mostly by women, and some by men. These songs were mostly composed by people who had experienced spiritual dilemmas, social crises, and those who had worn the quilt of what they regarded as a sinful life that had made them stray from God's love and happiness. Most of the songs were composed in the local language to address different themes and categories of people whom the local christian community has internalised as sinful, or people who are stress with confusion, pain and temptation. The songs have always provided spiritual nourishment and encouragement, to keep on with life, and look forward to a better life in heaven.

It is intriguing that unlike the Anglican community, the SSEC use of Sa'a language takes advantage of words that are inherently inspiring. The words tend to be used informally. Some words are and from other dialects. The selection of words, lyrics and tunes was highly inspiring. Anglicans compose songs or choruses as well, but terms, lyrics and tunes are very formal, suited to the formal Anglican liturgy. Traditionally guitars and keyboards were not used in the Anglican Church in Small Malaita. These modern musical instruments were only recently introduced by youth and the Mothers' Union. When I returned to Sa'a in 2017, I found that all Mothers Union, youth groups and Sunday schools were singing the SSEC local language songs. They had adopted the manner of SSEC Women's Fellowship and youth group singing.

I wish to provide an account of the gospel singing by the three Women's Fellowship groups I visited in 2015. I look at the types of choruses and songs, words and the nature of singing and emotional reactions to the songs. I visited these three SSEC villages and I kept the video clips and a digital record of the songs being sung. Only Likimaea and Riverside sang with a guitar. I didn't check as to why guitars or keyboards were not used. At Likimaea a talented young adult member of the Women's Fellowship played the guitar very well to the

songs' rhymes. This was not the case at Riverside, where one of the men who was present volunteered to play a guitar for the women.

It took me about thirty minutes by OBM to reach Roone from my local village, which is about 18 kilometres away. Roone is the biggest SSEC village in Small Malaita with a huge mixed population. The houses, mostly permanent buildings, are scattered along the valleys and contours, and down in the mangrove forest on the east coast. Like many church buildings on Small Malaita, the SSEC local church is built at the centre of the village, a permanent building and the largest SSEC village in Small Malaita, yet it was not properly completed. The meeting was held on a Monday morning from around 10am to midday. I could see that Roone women were very confident and self-assertive compared to the Riverside and Likimaea women.

The chorus singing proceeded as soon as a few women entered the church. Songs were mostly in the local language. I recorded and have noted the words and themes of a local song, *Noko lae sule* 'I will follow'. It was sung with a lively sense of enthusiasm.

Noko lae sule, nou sa'a ma'u lo'u
Nou leesi'o 'ioe pe'ie u sule mwane kiki'umu e hoela

Chorus: *Nou sa'a ma'u lo'u, nou sa'a ma'au lo'u*
Nou leesi'o io'e pe'ie u sule mwane kiki'imu 'e huela

(English) I am following you, I will never be afraid
I can see that that you are with me because your hand is strong

Chorus: I am following you, I will never be afraid
I can see that that you are with me because your hand is strong

The song featured the 'confidence in the strength of God' and that he will remove fear because he is strong. The song aroused great excitement, and had women standing upright stepping back and forth in an energetic dancing mode. It was a lively rhythm as the song was sung repeatedly. Although the song went on without any modern musical instrument, the content of the song and the meaning of the words seemed relevant to the women's personal reflection. The women's leader was a strong and energetic woman with a powerful voice that more often commanded women and transformed what supposed to be a research focus group meeting into a lively spiritual fellowship mode.

The singing mode at Likimae changed from the mode at Ro'one. After two weeks of rest, I went up to Likimaea and arrived in the evening after a full day walk upland into the mountains. After the arrangements for interviews were finalised, I had a meeting with the women on the following Sunday. The meeting was held later in the afternoon after the church service Sunday. I went to the church earlier before the women arrived. Unlike the Roone and Riverside women, Likimae women are shy and seem very humble and moved with great care. As I have described it in Chapter Two, Likimaea is situated far inland and the people's customary protocols of respect can be easily recognised. People are sensitive about how they approached each other, the words they speak and how they behave. A group of women arrived and were later followed by individual women. As soon as the first group of women arrived choruses started. I could see some women were in a rigid mode but as soon as the chorus had started, followed by the rhythm of the guitar, everyone joined in and sang harmoniously taking on different parts. As the song became increasingly louder, I watched the transforming faces of women smiling and sometimes graciously concentrating on the words of song. The chorus was a beautiful one framed in sensitive themes that captured the women's lives. The permanent church building is located on the hill towering the main village to the north facing the eastern side of Likimae and is far uphill. There was no man in attendance with the women and thus I could see the freedom of being alone. One of the songs that inspired most women and I could easily glance across and observe the changing mode and mixed emotions, between joyous clapping, and gentle mode of singing with eyes closed. Since I had recorded the songs on video clip, I could easily watch them later. Surprisingly the song was in English and loudly sung but it also had an indigenous language version. It began in English and was sung several times in English before moving into the local version.

English We are happy as we are matching day by day, we are walking in the beautiful light of God. In communion with my Lord, trusting in his holy word, we are working in the beautiful light of God.

Chorus Oooh...walking in the beautiful light of God, walking in the beautiful light of God. In communion with my Lord, trusting in his holy word, we are working in the beautiful light of God.

Language *Kie kei esu melisine luluiisule huni esu la laona mwatapwagna Lord*
I'ohu pe'ia Lord, noruto'o ana walana, kie kei esu ana mwatapwanga Lord.

Chorus: *Oooh, asu ana mwatapwanga Lord, Oooh, asu ana mwatapwanga Lord,*

I'ohu pe'ia Lord, noruto'o ana walana, kie kei esu ana mwatapwanga Lord.

The song was beautiful, with a lively emotional tune that rocked every woman present into the rhythms of dancing. But unlike the Roone women, Likimaea local women sat in the pews without any sign of standing or dancing even when the song was lively sung, and words had a motivating effect.

The song was framed on the idea of a 'Christian journey of excitement and perseverance with Jesus'. It appealed to one's steadfastness in faithfully following Jesus despite the many constraints of life out there. I could see glimpses of persistent imagination and the motivation of the song in these women's faces, taking into consideration the interviews about the constraints of social life that I was about to hear from them in the following days. Our meeting for the day began and ended with songs and powerful prayers, a practice that is very appropriate for many occasions and meetings, whether church or non-church meetings in Small Malaita.

On 4 September 2015, I arrived at Riverside, an hour OBM trip from Afio, the only government sub-station in Small Malaita. The village setting was orderly, where most houses are permanent buildings. Like Likimaea, the church building is located on a hill facing downward to the main village. The church is also a permanent building wide and long in size that could hold the village congregations on a Sunday service. On Sunday two services were held, one after the other. A main service for the whole community began, and after it was finished, a Holy Communion service followed. It was quite intriguing to observe this service as it was my first time to participate in a SSEC Holy Communion. After the first service, an announcement from the pastor was echoed, instructing non-communicants to leave the church. The people who left the church included 'back-sliders', non-baptised members, and people who had experienced a 'sinful life', and may have decided not to participate. Children also exited. The Eucharistic elements was shared in a more gendered manner where the local deaconess served women sitting on the left side pews and deacons served men on the right side. The Eucharist took an hour.

In the afternoon on that Sunday, members of the Women's Fellowship assembled in the church building after lunch. A gospel chorus with the excitement of hand clapping and swinging sideways took control of the singing. Unlike the Likimaea women, the songs were

mostly in the local language; one that had an emotional impact for the women was *hanue to'ohu* real home.

Hanue toohu mauringe nge ana, maenga haike, wa ngaranga wa masanga, rinkananga, tarurei, hanue toohu.

Chorus: Kolu kei lae ta'au, pe'ie mwesinge na ilenimwae'nga, la hanue e diana, kolu kei lae ta'au.

(English translation)

A real home where true life is and where no death or no crying, or no shame but happiness is, in this real home

Chorus: We will go up there with laughter and joy in that good home. We will go up.

The chorus is one of a highly inspired song that is mostly sung throughout the SSEC local churches in Small Malaita. I realised later on when I returned after fieldwork to Sa'a Mothers' Union, the chorus was being sung by the Mothers' Union members and widely sung by many Anglican youth groups. The Small Malaita SSEC is popular for composing inspiring gospel songs and lived experience songs in the local Sa'a language. Most of these songs are personal testimonies about how Christians failed on the journey to follow Jesus, and that regardless of this hardship, the good life and beauty in heaven should be a motivating focus for Christians. Like in other SSEC fellowship meetings, such moving chorus, inspired women's spiritual imagination, as well as being empowering. The chorus captures a strong imagination of the binaries of a new *home* heaven and hell.

Positive		Negative
<i>Mauringe to'ohu</i>	real life	<i>Maenga</i> death
<i>Rikanga</i>	happiness	<i>Ngaranga</i> crying
<i>Mwesinge</i>	Laughter	<i>Masanga</i> shame

The chorus conveys a strong impression of the constraints of Christian life experience, drawing on the binaries between real life, which is heaven, and bad life, the world. What really struck me when observing these women, is a strong feeling about the limitations that

women might experience in homes and communities. How would they continue to experience this life yet still be smiling and enjoying fellowship meetings and church services with emotional songs and inspired messages? Women have the propensity for singing at any location or in events they feel like singing in without any hesitation. Singing has powerful effects on these women's lives. It channels a strong feeling of power and strength drawn from the Biblical messages in the songs and from the uplifting experience of singing in full voice in the close company of other women. When local women sing such inspired choruses, it gives them a persuasive sense of confidence in God and in themselves that despite the many challenges they face and the constraints they navigate, they will succeed. Such theological belief and reflection, usually drawn from the songs they sing, provides an area of subtle empowerment for local women.

While this ethnographic account only provide a brief scenario about the manner in which local Small Malaita Christian women sing gospel songs and choruses in their respective communities, however, the account provides another lens into the world of these local women, and the activities which they value and engage with. Singing is an important part of women's lives. It is a Christian women's domain. Therefore, singing in this context is invoked as a medium through which women narrate their entanglement in social and spiritual life, yet continues to be persuaded by the hope and aspiration of a new socio-spiritual empowerment and emancipation. The subsequent account provides ethnographic personal narratives of church women's experiences within their church communities.

The Experience of the Small Malaita Women's Fellowship and the Mothers' Union

This section introduces an ethnographic study of the SSEC Women's Fellowship, and the Mothers' Union, drawing on their experiences and considering their views concerning women's roles and status in local churches on Small Malaita. The interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed. The key terms and expressions were kept in Sa'a language and were highlighted and discussed in the case studies.

The data has shown that local church women in the SSEC and the ACOM have continued to experience discrimination. Women have internalised common gender stereotypes, often uttered by certain church leaders against them. Hence leadership is gendered. Males take on the formal leadership roles of the local church, while local women lead in women's

groups and fellowship. The binary is marked out and expressed by women themselves in the interviews.

The local women used the following themes to express their views and experiences in both churches, in their own languages and expressions. The first local term that appeared in the data is *hu'e huni helehele* (woman as a subordinate). Women have described themselves as people meant to be subordinate to men.

***Hu'e huni helehele* (Woman as a Subordinate)**

The term subordination has various meanings. It means “something is less important than the other thing” (Coubuild, 2010:1559). The *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* defines it as “having less power or authority than somebody else in a group or organisation”. However, in social science subordination has always been used to refer to relationships of power, access to privilege and resources, and decision making. In this case, the term “women's subordination” refers to the “position of women, their lack of access to resources and decision-making and the patriarchal domination that women are subjected to in most societies” (Sultana, 2011:7). Sultana further sums it up in this way.

...women's subordination means the inferior position of women to men. The feeling of powerlessness, discrimination and experience of limited self-esteem and self-confidence jointly contribute to the subordination of women. Thus, women's subordination is a situation, where a power relationship exists and men dominate women. The subordination of women is a central feature of all structures of interpersonal domination, but feminists choose different locations and causes of subordination (Sultana, 2011:7).

In the Sa'a language, the term *keni huni helehele* refers to a woman who is there to do what she is told without disobeying. In a way, the woman is seen as someone who can offer just manual support for the men without contributing ideas or decision-making. The field data reveal related themes that demonstrate the degree of women's subordination. The themes were drawn from the expressions of their experiences within the local church and society environment. The local key terms used embrace deeper meanings and are fundamental to the realisation of these themes and trends.

***Ka'a Malisi* (Unfit)**

The general feeling of inferiority among women, comparable to the superiority of men in the context of the SSEC and the ACOM, forms one of the sub-themes which I describe here

as *ka'a malisi* (unfit or incapable). The term *malisi* refers to a general evaluation of one's fitness and capability to perform a duty or an action that is worthy of public or group approval, and *ka'a* signifies not. *Malisi* covers or implies personal intelligence, knowledge, physical stature, and social and economic orientations. For instance, a Small Malaitan observer would say *a May e ka'a malisi*. This means, *May is not fit or incapable*. May herself might say, *nou ka'a malisi*, meaning *I am not fit or capable*. This 'cultural evaluation' (Ortner, 1996:87) has been found sternly inscribed in self-descriptions by local women. Alice, a member of the Mothers' Union explains.

In my personal feeling, I just feel that women *ka'a malisi* (not fit) for those positions. They are not fit to be appointed for these kinds of work [leadership positions]. I have the feeling that women *ka'a malisi* (not fit) for the work anymore...when a woman is born, she knows that she is a *keni* (woman) and that all along she knows that she is unfit for positions of leadership (Interview, Alice, 6 September 2015).

Because local women are seen as unfit, they are considered as powerless to take on leadership roles in the SSEC. They could only perform functions on condition that permission is granted by the male leaders of the church, even though the church teaches equality between men and women. Their leadership could only be seen in the Women's Fellowship as described by Lilian.

In the SSEC villages, men are *paine* (big). Men usually being elected and have authority of the local church. That continues until today. We do not have *painanga* (authority) over the local church. Only in Women's Band [Fellowship] do we have authority over it and you can see women's leadership. We just cannot go up there. We only go when we are told to do so by men. Although the Bible says that we are equal, I don't know. It was like that now. We just cannot go up there now (Interview, Lilian, 6 September 2015).

This is common in the SSEC, as Jenny explains:

One of the things that makes women not to take on leadership positions such as church pastor is that men always look down on women as *ka'a malisi* (unfit) for those leadership positions in the church. We have deaconesses here as well who work with men but their roles are different. But as I have said, SSEC often think of women as people to manage homes and look after the family and children's affairs, and do gardening. In this we have the kind of attitude towards women (Interview, Jenny, 6 September 2015).

The sentiment of *ka'a malisi* is not only expressed by SSEC women, but also by ACOM women in Small Malaita as well. There is a general feeling among women that men are perceived by the church as *malisi*, and women as *ka'a malisi* based on cultural and religious

beliefs about women. The binary opposition of gender ranking of *malisi*, for men, and *ka'a malsisi* for woman is clearly exemplified in the public roles that the church has offered to men compared to women (cf. Ortner, 1996). Mary explains.

It is very difficult for us women. For example, sometimes the church teaches that men and women are equal and that if we follow this teaching we will see men and women have similar roles in the church. But all along, the church has placed men above women. For example, in our village, we usually have men in the vestry committee or other committees in the church. They hold important positions such as chairman and most of the time they are the ones who do the planning and making decisions. So, what we do is that we just stay quiet and follow what happened or [what they] decided for us to do. Men do the reading and take intercessions in church. They also serve and assist the priest at the sanctuary. But as far as I can remember, and the only two particular roles that sometimes men could give to us are Bible reading and prayer of intercessions (Interview, Mary, 20 February 2015).

Small Malaita women live by such cultural evaluation and belief that being a *keni* (female) disadvantages them from assuming the status men occupy and the roles they perform. Although the field data relates to gender relations within the church context of the SSEC, and ACOM, it signifies a longstanding “cultural evaluation” (Ortner, 1986:23) of women in Small Malaita traditional society. Women seen as unfit for public leadership roles such as chiefs or elders in the village is an inherent cultural belief. Alice makes the same claim that the church enforces Melanesian cultural beliefs emphasising male leadership over women based on cultural evaluation.

In my view at the moment the church was influenced by Melanesian custom, that is why it puts men to lead the women. In Melanesian culture, people don't allow women to be equal to men, and in this case, the church is not allowing women to be equal to men. Women have always been *haiano* (at the lower level). There is a ‘gap’ between the men and the women (Interview, Alice, 7 March 2015).

Many Small Malaita women are intelligent, physically fit, good organisers and feast givers (cf. Pollard, 2006), and wise with a good understanding of local histories (cf. Keesing, 1989). Despite this, the attitude in Small Malaita is that a woman cannot be enthroned as a chief even if she is born as the only child of a chief. Furthermore, in many cases, women are excluded from village committees, because they are considered inappropriate and culturally unfit to be present with men.

Hu'e e Mwamwate (Woman is without weight)

The SSEC women, like the ACOM women, have described themselves as *mwamwate* (lightweight) in the eyes of the church. This feeling has contrasted with the church's view on men as *hi'ehi'e* (heavy or with weight). The descriptions have deep psychological implications for how women are treated in the church. The local women have described this experience from various standpoints. For instance, Lisa said that she realised being *hiiaela* (feel bad or feeling empty) in church during public worship when she read the Bible from the lectern. She could see how disapproving the men were.

Although, I was asked to take Bible reading in church, every time I stand in front to read, I always *hiiaela* (feel empty and nothing). I am afraid of people especially older ones, who are not always happy with women standing in front (Interview, Lisa, 3 March 2015).

This experience is quite obvious in many local churches in Small Malaita. Women have always been reluctant to take up Bible readings or make announcements in church because of the feeling that they were not important. In the SSEC, the experience takes a different form. This is to do with the manner in which important church responsibilities and subordinate responsibilities are assigned. Joylin describes the scenario:

SSEC does not allow women to become pastors and take up top leadership positions because the church has kept the tradition that only men can become pastors. Hence women always think that they are not fit for leadership. They [women] feel that they are small and are *mwamwate* (lightweight) unworthy even to stand in front of the men. It is like that in our local church villages that those leadership roles in the church are only for men and not for women (Interview, Joylin, 6 September 2015).

Even if both men and women assume a similar position in the church, the nature of the roles they perform reflect their gender. One of the positions is that of the deacon. This treatment differs from the Anglican Church (in the case of those Anglican Provinces that accepted the ordination of women) where the roles of a deacon are liturgical and permanent regardless of gender. A local senior pastor explains the different roles deacons and deaconess perform in the church:

The deacons [men] have different responsibilities from the deaconess [women]. Their task in the church is to prepare the elements, food and wine for the Holy Communion. The deaconess is not allowed to prepare those holy elements. The deacons also look after the administration of the church. Currently one of the deacons is a treasurer of the church, and another is secretary. Their work is to plan

and administer our local church...they [deaconesses] are there to sweep the church building, clean around, do floral decorations for the church, wash the altar cloths, brushing around the church (Interview, E. Ahukela, 7 September 2015).

The classification of the deacon's roles along gendered categories is an interesting phenomenon. For the local SSEC church communities, it is not a new experience because the nature of roles is aligned with Small Malaitan culture and gender roles. However, it is part of the church ministry, hence similar treatment of women occurs even with certain senior positions in the SSEC church in Honiara. Male privilege appears even when men and women are both appointed to the same position. Complaining against the treatment of the Church, the National Coordinator of SSEC Women has questioned this tradition:

How do they see us women? I am an elder in my local church but then I am not given the right and privilege to consecrate the Holy Communion elements. Only the male elders and the local pastors do the consecration part. Why do the men do the consecration part and not the women? I am an elder in my local church, the same leadership position as the men. Why do they always choose men to do it, even to greet and welcome people in church? Only male elders do those things. I did not have any chance yet although I have the same title as the men (Interview, C. Keni, 1 October 2015).

In practice, the roles that the deaconess performs appear more physically laborious but less symbolically significant while the roles that deacons perform are less laborious but have greater weight or influence on the local church social scale. Although women's roles are laborious, they are usually considered as *mwamwate* (lightweight) on the social scale.

Mwane pwaune Hu'e (Man as head of Woman)

There has been a strong emphasis on the headship of men over women in the SSEC, and the ACOM. However, far more strongly than the ACOM, the SSEC puts emphasis on the Bible teaching while recognising cultural relativity, while ACOM incorporates local culture. The field data has indicated that there is a strong belief that men are heads of women. The local women affirm the belief in the light of stories and teaching about women's roles and position in the Bible. They also correlate the belief to the inherent cultural teaching and beliefs about men and women's roles in the local society. However, local women face a dilemma as they believe in the equality of men and women in the eyes of God, while the teaching of the Bible and the local culture maintains that man must remain the head of the woman. One of the local SSEC women participants explained it as:

...the Bible teaches that women will always be second and only there as helper to men. The story is clear in the book of Genesis. God created Eve from the left rib of Adam. That rib was below the arm of Adam. God meant Adam to be the head, we women are like Eve to be just the helpers (Interview, June, 7 September 2015).

A large number of SSEC women can recite the Bible and are well versed with the Bible texts and have always invoked the Bible to provide textual evidence to support their actions. Historically, women learned to read and recite such texts in order to apply them to life situations through the Women's Fellowship.

SSEC women are "Bible women" (a term used by Choi, 2014:43). June has quoted the Bible creation story to underscore a sociological point of view and reiterated the importance of orderliness and peaceful coexistence between the husband and the wife. Interestingly, she went further and interpreted the same creation story to legitimise women's subordinate roles and lower position, further emphasising the importance of men's headship and leadership as husbands. This is a commonly accepted view among many local women in Small Malaita.

Thus, it is wise to see women fulfilling those subordinate roles as helpers and not leaders. So, our roles are not to dominate the roles of the men but to be there to help them. So, I think that was the reason our church SSEC did not put women to be pastors or ordained them...so I think the Bible has taught people to think that way of course [for] the SSEC to treat women like that. So, it's good. This is because if men and women are equal, there will not be good decision making. There will be *olobaot* (chaos). So, it's good that women must be lower and men higher so that they will compromise and have order at home (Interview, June, 7 September 2015).

June's explanation reflects a strong cultural philosophy concerning the position of women in the household in relation to their husbands in Small Malaita.

Exclusive participation of men in decision-making at home and in the church reflects the headship and authority of men over women. Monica, a member of the Mothers' Union has affirmed it:

I can see some negative things that the church does to the women. In many cases, only men plan and make decisions. Because men are the *alahanga* (authority), the head of the church and *liosule* (manage) it, they make rules that only allow men to participate in important church activities (Interview, Monica, 20 March 2015).

A wife's submission is strongly emphasised in the church as a mark of Christian loyalty. The data has also shown that women continue to accept this norm despite the dilemma of believing that God created them equal. A member of the Women's Fellowship explains:

According to the Holy One men and women should be the same. They should be equal but because we follow our *kastom*, men are up there in front, and women are now in the low places all the time. So, we just sit and watch the men taking the lead. It happens in Small Malaita (Interview, Pamela, 22 July 2015).

The local cultural tradition reinforces the Biblical imperative of women's submission to their husbands. Pamela explains how,

When I came to marry my husband, I know that the Bible says that wife must submit to her husband. The wife must submit under the leadership of the husband. He is the head of the woman. You woman, you are just the helper of the husband. So, in the house, I must honour my husband. If I have to go to a particular place, I would say, "mama'a (father) I am going to this place today". I must ask my husband to ensure that he allows me to go where other women of the group are going. If he says yes, I will be very happy but if he says no to me, then I cannot disobey him (Interview, Pamela, 22 July 2015).

Another participant affirms the imperative of wife submission.

Submission is a thing for women in our culture. So, women must submit to the leadership of men in the church. We are there only to listen to the men talking and planning. It is embarrassing for us to talk in church. We have followed this practice for a long time, so it's like a rule that we must follow. (Interview, Josephine, 6 September 2015)

The women participants mostly referred to the Pauline advice to the Christian communities in Ephesus 5: 22-23 and Colossians 3:18. These are well-known texts that the local SSEC women have always reflected on in their Women's Fellowship and as the wife's submission is compatible with the local culture, it is accepted.

The ACOM women draw on local culture together with the Bible. The headship of men over women is strongly articulated and there is a belief that the church has merged this with the Biblical teaching. Helen, a senior member of the Mothers' Union explained:

It is difficult to change this *kastom*. Men or our husbands are our head. We cannot go without them. Just like a body cannot exist without its head. So while, some people may want to see women being equal with men it would be difficult because, the body cannot be the head, they are separate things. This is important because our culture has taught us and we need to follow to avoid problems happening in the home (Interview, Helen, 25 February 2015).

The SSEC local women were taught the same culture and continue to hold to the headship of men over women. The headship of men over women is taught to the women as part of the cultural tradition. Women are aware that they are not permanently under parental authority but are moveable through marriage, thus they do not have power to take leadership.

You know our *kastom* has taught us that when a woman enters her husband's house, she automatically come under the headship of her husband. This is our traditional *kastom* that we have inherited from the past. We have to stay under his headmanship. He is the head of the house. He owns the household and women are only guests or visitors at his house. So, who are we to complain against him? For us women who travelled far from our own villages and arrived here at Korutalau through marriage, we were instructed to know that *alaha* (chief) is the overall authority of the village. We have to live by his order too (Interview Doreen, 1 September 2015).

The Bible as the source of Christian beliefs and pattern of thinking has built on the local cultural tradition that women are required to submit to their husbands as their head and head of the household. Submission as a significant value and a mark of Christianity is further constructed as a precondition to the Christian model of wife (Macintyre, 1989; Choi, 2014; Choi & Jolly, 2014). It signifies respect and honour on the part of the woman towards the husband as the head of the wife and household.

The roles women play in the church signify a preordained model. Women continue to experience their treatment as helpers to the headship of men in the church according to the creation model in the Bible.

***Hu'e ka'a Manata* (Woman Lacks Intelligence)**

The data also reveals that the church authorities perceive women as unintelligent when it comes to preaching and sharing the word of God. In particular, men in the church often question the women's judgement regarding their interpretation of visions. One of the senior pastors of the SSEC clearly made this claim, describing how:

During the 1970s when we entered the period of revival the SSEC has opened so widely that women claimed to have seen many visions. During those times things were messed up; just anybody could go up and claim they had spiritual visions and revelations from the *Masta* especially women. We see that there is a need for some control for the women. If they claim to see a vision, they should not quickly jump to the pulpit but go first to the pastor to check it through with the word of God. So, we just want to see that the roles of the women be

separated from men. We want to ensure we have order in the church (Interview, E. Ahukela, 7 September 2015).

The SSEC has experienced two revivals. The first was in the 1940s and the second was in the 1970s (Burt, 1994:240-243). Revival is a spiritual awakening when SSEC Christians believe that God through the power of the Holy Spirit is in the process of renewing and reviving the church from the sin of unfaithfulness, to strengthen Christians to know God better.

The role of charismatic and Pentecostal Christianity in Melanesia and its transforming effect on gendered relations is well documented (see, Robbins, 2004; 2014; Eriksen, 2014). I find this work relevant to the discussion of gender and Christianity in Small Malaita among the SSEC. Joel Robbins' (2014) book, *Spirit Women* (*Spirit-meri*) in Urapmin, Papua New Guinea shows how a Pentecostal revival movement transformed gender roles in the traditional church setting. This enabled women to become 'spiritually capable' as *Spirit Women* in an unprecedented way. *Spirit Women* are intermediaries of the Holy Spirit and are usually possessed by the Spirit. They reveal those indigenous spirits that make people sick, reveal lost property and expose secrets when they are consulted. Local male diviners are not possessed by the Holy Spirit, in the manner in which local *Spirit Women* are. Robbins (2014) argues that Christianity has led to a form of Christian individualism that replaced the relationalism, which was characteristic of traditional religion. He argues that Pentecostal Christianity has created space in which both men and women share the same opportunities as God's children to preach, speak and perform all the different roles in the church. As pointed by Robbins, the notion of 'speaking' or preaching in Pentecostal theology, is that it demonstrated the individual capacity of a 'Spirit-filled' person, who has the control of the Spirit. In Urapmin, one cannot dare to protest against the *Spirit Women* speaking. This ethnography may help understand the effect of revival and conversion in the SSEC.

While the pattern of transformation appears similar to other Pentecostal movements in Melanesia, earlier movements in the SSEM in the 1940s and SSEC in the 1970s further obstructed the role of women as 'individual Christians' to speak or preach. Christianity would not be able to transform a gendered person. In a way, women could preach through their own motivations, and may be under the direction of the '*Holy-Spirit*' similar to the case of *Spirit Women* in Urapmin, their gender has not been transformed. The assigned

cultural value of women as unintelligent or lacking reasoning would not be removed. This contrast and dilemma are prevalent in the case of the SSEC in Small Malaita.

Although a number of women had attended Bible schools in the 1960s and early 1970s, and had gained sufficient knowledge of the Bible and preaching, the tradition and practice of disallowing women from taking on formal leadership in the church has continued to persist. For instance, in Small Malaita women could preach only at the discretion of the local pastor. They just do not have the independent authority to preach alone.

We elect someone to lead the ministry and we can preach. However, our preaching is very much only for the women. But if the pastor includes us in the programme, then we can be able to preach in church. Otherwise the ministry is very much for the women. Our programmes are only for the women not men (Interview, Josephine, 6 September 2015).

The pastor himself has confirmed that claim (Interview, E. Ahukela, 7 September 2015). The Women's Fellowship is a space in which women are free to express themselves and preach God's word even if those activities lack formality and sound knowledge according to the local church leaders. In other words, the local church is a male domain and it is forbidden from women for fear of preaching their own ideas and hearsay in the church. Their privilege to preach or openly share God's word is subject to the male authority and scrutiny. Such an ideological framework has resulted in a common feeling of inadequacy.

The ACOM women also faced similar stereotypes of women as *ka'a manata* (without intelligence). There is a general feeling among the Mothers' Union, that people hold the view that they lack knowledge and intelligence to manage themselves, thus they were often been made fun off. Helen explains:

In the village while some people supported us, however, there many people mostly men used to *ha'amwasi ameelu* (make fun of us) and called us *meres* (Marys) whenever they see us going to attend our meetings. Some times when they see us Mothers' Union they would mock us saying "*ia a Sen Mere oto ko liu*" (yes, St Mary is passing by) treating us as though *pwaumeelu e aela* (our head are without proper thinking) (Interview, Helen, 16 February 2015).

But quite strongly and more often, local Mothers' Union members were often referred to as *mwala pwardje 'e aela* (people who are not thinking properly). This has clearly marked out by the way men often *ha'amwasi* (make fun) of women as expressed by Helen:

More often, we were been made fun of as *mwala pwardje e aela* (people who do not think properly). They always refer to us women, especially members of the Mothers' Union as people without brains because we often move around when we follow out programmes or attended the Mothers' Union important days (Interview, Helen, 22 February 2015).

While the intelligence of women is one of the concerns of the church, another is the moral standing of the women in domestic life. There is a concern that while some women earn higher academic qualifications in theological or Biblical studies, their moral life in the home needs to be compatible with their studies and church work. Although this concern is also important for male leaders of the church, it is particularly relevant for women. The Vice- Bishop explains the concern.

Concerning women being ordained, I would say while the SSEC has come to this stage, the SSEC considers leadership against the quality of life that a person has. We do not look at the qualifications or knowledge but basically, we look at the 'life' of a person. Though she has a 'paper' the question is, does she reflect on who she is, the family and why she does things? When she comes in and returns from church meetings, does she reflect what she said in the meeting? Sometimes, the woman may appear well in meetings but on return, her husband complains about her (Interview, P. Maesulitala, 1 October 2015).

Although the prerequisites for Christian leadership are believed to be a Christian vocation and calling coupled with some theological or Biblical training, the scrutiny of the domestic moral life of a woman appears to be one of the conditions that qualifies her for any public leadership in the church (see also, Douglas, 2003), not the belief that Christian leadership is a vocation which God and not human beings has initiated. The local congregation and the husband have to approve that the woman's lifestyle is morally sound before she can be considered for leadership. The Vice-Bishop reiterates that:

Sometimes the general congregation raises complaints against her as well. So, if people are happy and the husband appreciates her lifestyle based on her living out what she said, then the church will consider her. If not, then she could not be considered for any leadership positions (Interview, P. Maesulitala, 1 October 2015).

A woman is expected to perform well at home and to show a good example to her immediate family and clan, before she could stand out in the community to perform public roles. Such a gendered ideological argument represents Melanesian thinking or deep Malaita conceptualisations about the role of women. However, such an explanation holds no ground because it is not simply a matter of a woman needing to prove herself morally

before being appointed to a leadership position, because the question of appointing women to leadership positions has never actually been opened in the SSEC at all before or since its independence in 1964. Also, a number of women are well trained and qualified and have commanded outstanding Christian moral reputations in the SSEC in the recent past, however they have not been considered for any leadership positions in the ordained ministry of the church. The National Coordinator of SSEC Women has questioned this practice as follows:

I want to find out why the church has treated us like this. I don't see any reason and I was not given any why women could not perform these roles. Why don't you tell me why I should not do it? So still I haven't got an answer to that until today we have not received any explanation. I observed and read the history of the SSEC women and saw that a number of women have risen up in the church in the past. Most of them were very powerful and influential. They were very dynamic in their leadership. But to really come to this level, it is a NO. They haven't given any chance yet for women to reach even the level of 'Reverend.' They are still ordaining only the men even until now. No woman has been ordained in the SSEC yet. I am just a women's coordinator, and this is the highest position that a woman can reach. I reach this position and I won't go up any further (Interview, C. Keni, 1 October 2015).

Huni Ne'i Hu'e (Being a Woman)

The field data has shown that while the churches rhetorically advocate equality for men and women following their fundamental Christian beliefs, there is clear evidence that the traditional gender roles and status are enforced and perpetuated in the church. From the outset the church continued to advocate on different levels. For instance, the ACOM has continued to pursue the ordination of women through constitutional amendments to enable women to be ordained despite being vetoed, and in the SSEC a number of pastors being interviewed had supported women to become elected as senior church leaders such as pastors, reverend and bishop. There has been a strong view among church women that although they live and work within a Christian sphere, being a woman means a bounded reality.

The leader of one of the local Women's Fellowship groups explains:

It is true for us in Small Malaita. When a woman is born, as she grows, she knows that she is female. I know that the church can remove these barriers but then culture makes it hard because among the people of Small Malaita, [a] woman knows that she is a woman and all along she knows that she is not fit for the positions of leadership in church (Interview, Josephine, 6 September 2015).

It is clear that in the traditional Small Malaitan culture, only men take on public leadership and women are not permitted culturally to take on such roles. Their roles are domestic, and they should only give opinions on matters of importance when necessary. Both traditional leaders and church leaders on Small Malaita, including the SSEC, and the ACOM, consider that order in society should be maintained through the preservation and advocacy of the philosophy of *ha'ama'unge*. A senior pastor explained how:

We have separated these roles between men and women because we want *ha'ama'unge* to be maintained in the church. Things must be in order. It does not look good for women to move around in the church. It does not look respectable to us (Interview, E. Ahukela, 7 September 2015).

The description “does not look good”, connotes the avoidance of men and women mixing in the same public space and performing the same roles. It is commonly believed that such mixing has the potential to allow sexual relations. Women are stereotyped as sexual enticers and a threat to men’s sexual desire, a potential to cause social disorder. On Malaita, one of the most life-threatening issues is for a male to be caught with a married woman in the same space even without any sexual contact. So, keeping to the rules of separation of public roles and spaces is necessary in Small Malaita. This applies across Malaita. Such a feeling that the presence of women in public space and leadership is ‘chaotic’ is shared by many SSEC women. “If the church wants *ha'ama'unge* to its positions of leadership, then only men can take on leadership positions and not women. Women are not *malisi* for those positions” (Interview, Josephine, 6 September 2015).

Not only that, but women are believed to pollute sacred space (Burt, 1994; Keesing, 1989). There is a strong belief in Small Malaita that women’s menstrual fluid contains *maha* (pollutant power) that could contaminate sacred spaces. Local women of both churches have expressed deep experience of being a woman and its sensitivity. This has been strongly expressed. Nester, an elderly member of the Mothers’ Union reiterated this common belief and feeling.

We must think about *apu*, about why those places are restricted from women. What we see today is the old practice of sacrifice in the past. Traditionally women were restricted to the sacred shrine. She could not step over the *te'ete'e* (shrine)...because women are *lo'uhanga'a* (have profaning power). She is *hi'e* (heavy) to lift her leg into the shrine. Man is *mwamwate* (light) to lift his leg on the sacred shrine. He is too light to move around. As far as sacrifice is concern, the woman is *hi'e*. She is *hi'e* to lift her leg on the shrine. So women are

lo'uhanga'a (bad luck) with *maha* (pollution) and polluted (Interview, Nester, 20 March 2015).

Nester takes a more radical religious view of women. The use of the notion of *hi'ie* and *mwamwate* here are used in a negative sense. Men are referred to as *mwamwate* because of the belief that they are non-polluted, while women are *hi'e* due to the condition of pollution of the body, thus they would not be *malisi* to stand in the sanctuary or around the altar. This ideological belief about the profane embodiment of women, has been invoked as one of the many arguments to oppose the ordination of women to the priesthood, and restrict women's roles in the church sanctuary. Such ideological belief does not only exist in Small Malaita ACOM, but also in the SSEC local churches.

Historically in the SSEC, women were not allowed to take leadership roles such as presiding at a Holy Communion service in the SSEC. This is in accordance with the Old Testament rules in the Bible where the altar is holy and only male priests could enter the sanctuary to offer sacrifice. The religious law ruled that women were profane and could not enter the temple's holiest place. To conservative local SSEC people, this practice must be maintained in the church as it accords with culture and religion. An elderly woman, a former deaconess of SSEC has raised this observation:

In the past it's really *aapu* (forbidden) to see women to go up to the altar and pulpit to give Holy Communion. It really is. It's really *aapu* (forbidden). Only men can give Holy Communion... Since the Gospel came white missionaries came to Afio to start teaching there. During that time my elder brothers Aisel Laealaha and Bethel Mwanemoru used to take turns to give Holy Communion to the white women missionaries. Two other pastors joined them and they made a schedule that each of the four pastors would give Holy Communion to the white missionary women (Interview, I. Honitalokeni, 7 September 2015).

Although the white missionary women took leadership roles in the Afio Girl's Bible Institute from 1935 to 1975, these roles were restricted to administration, teaching and the management of school matters.



Figure 45: Indrid Honitalokeni

Indrid is from Riverside, a *toro* (chief's daughter) and former SSEC deaconess who spoke about the importance of traditional customary *ha'atolanga* (rule) governing women's roles, behaviour and conduct in Small Malaita. **Source:** ©Ben Wate, 6 September 2015.

Their roles did not involve formal leadership in church services such as preaching and officiating in the sacrament of Holy Communion. Small Malaita women who grew up

during that period witnessed this. Indrid Honitalokeni, who is now in her late seventies, was one of the young women in the 1950s, who may have got married by the 1960s, and could recall what happened in the church and at Afio Girl's Bible Institute at her village Riverside, one of the main SSEC villages on Small Malaita which is close to Afio.

Although the restriction on women in public leadership in the SSEC is considered to have been based on the Bible, there is a strong correlation with the traditional culture and religion on the status of women. In Small Malaita, women are considered vulnerable and weak, thus they must not be out in public alone. They must be protected from being harmed. Her life is well suited to the role of home and as family welfare provider of care and food and keeping the home in order. She is not as a public figure as most of her roles are connected to the home. Her body is believed to have *maha* (pollution) that could cause misfortunes, and desacralise sacred places, and men's power (see Ivens, 1972; Keesing, 1989; Burt, 1994). In Malaita, man is considered as *apu/abu* (sacred) and women as *mola* (ordinary) (Keesing, 1989). In defining her being, whenever a Small Malaita woman moves in public space, she has to ensure to *ha'ahilihili* (restrict) or carefully consider the right time and space to occupy.

You know in our *kastom* that sanctuary, called *henue aapu* (holy place) was to be *ha'ahilihili* (restricted). It was like the altar of Jerusalem. Its *aapu* and only a priest can enter that place. It's not allowed for *ta'e molawau nga inoni* (ordinary person) to trespass into it. If any ordinary person goes up there, *malunga'a* (sacred shadow) will come down upon him or her she won't be strong enough to resist it. They taught us those things that the altar and the sanctuary are *apu* (Interview, I. Houtalokeni, 7 September 2015).

***Hu'e huni Liolioi Suli Ha'awali* (Woman as a temporary Leader)**

The field data have shown that women have not been seen as emerging leaders but largely considered as *lio isuli ha'awali* (to look after temporarily) or sparehands as uttered by Betty and Catherine. The sub-theme expresses the view that women have not been considered or trusted for pastoral leadership within the local church but only as temporary replacements to male leadership. Like the SSEC women, local Anglican women could only step into leadership roles as temporary leaders just to fill in a gap of leadership vacated by men who have to attend to other commitments. Elizabeth explains:

Although, *hanue e pwala* (the village is empty) because the men have gone to work in Honiara, and leaving down these church work, we

have to wait for men to tell us what to do in church because the church is under their control. We must not remain quiet but wait upon what they will tell us to do (Interview, Elizabeth, 18 March 2015).

The only role that connects to the leadership of a local SSEC is the position of deaconess. However, as discussed earlier, the role of the deaconess is more reflective of the traditional roles of women in the domestic sphere. Only in exceptional situations when men are not available can a woman provide leadership in the church as Ahukela indicates:

A case occurred at Su'uri'i where no man was trained or even educated so a woman was appointed for two years to pastor the church while the man was sent to train to lead the church. But before this arrangement happened, our senior elder went and consults our Bishop. This was an exceptional case so permission was granted for that woman to pastor the local church at Su'uri'i. The man went to the Bible College and no man was available in the village so she stepped it. The man returned last year [2014] and now takes over the leadership (Interview, E. Ahukela, 7 September 2015).

An assistant pastor of Roone local church also confirms the practice of temporary appointments of women for pastoral leadership.

Concerning the leadership of positions such as a pastor, women could be appointed as pastor if there are no men in the village to lead. ... For instance, some years back, in a village up in the inland close to Likimaea, Waii'o and Hote, there was a woman who became a pastor for the two SSEC villages there. The SSEC leadership accepted that appointment because there were no men in the village to take on the work. The women themselves do understand this, that they only take leadership when men are not available, and when men arrive they will return the leadership position to them. They have a very clear understanding about this (Interview, F. Walani, 27 July 2015).

I visited the satellite SSEC village at Weii'o, near Likimaea, a large SSEC community in the mountainous interior of Small Malaita and spoke to Betty, a former village pastor. Although she felt that this was largely a male position, she felt obliged to lead the local community as a temporary pastor to replace her aging father who was not able to lead any more. She was to fill in the leadership position temporarily awaiting the return of her younger brother who had departed for further training at Onepusu Bible College.

I took this position to replace my father who was former pastor in our small village. At his old age he had no one to replace him so he said that since no one to replace him so, he said to me "you are to take this position as pastor of Weii'o. You must take the *Masta's* work in my place until your brother returns..." so after some years, I have handed

over the work to my younger brother who was born behind me
(Interview, Betty, 1 September 2015).

However, even if a woman like Betty continues to work as a local village pastor at Weii'o, that would not be a major concern in the upper authority of the SSEC because as far as the constitution of the SSEC is concerned, all local churches must be registered with the General Secretary at the national headquarters in Honiara. In this case, Weii'o is only a satellite church with less than ten households so the position of Betty's leadership roles as pastor was not a serious concern as in the case at Su'uri'i. In the case of Su'uri'i, permission by the church was given for a woman to be a part-time pastor for two years awaiting her husband who was on training. Su'uri'i is a relatively large village community.

The temporary appointment of women as spare-hand leaders has been a norm in the SSEC. The National Coordinator of SSEC women confirmed the practice as normal.

My observation in SSEC is that women take on leadership on conditions, and it happens that way when men are not available, women will come in as alternatives to take on leadership responsibility. But when men are available, women won't be given any leadership responsibilities. When you want to talk about leadership in the SSEC, it rests with the men, not so much the women (Interview, C. Keni, 1 October 2015).

Although there were no complaints about female leadership roles in the SSEC in terms of theological education and pastoral capability, the empowerment and development of women's leadership and training has always been constrained by the traditional chiefly authority, which has merged strongly with the local church leadership. A senior church pastor who is also a chief has highlighted this.

Concerning women leadership in our local church as pastor, it is difficult. Even in the future it will still be difficult...here, it is difficult to see women from Riverside to go for Bible training. It's true. The statement that men are biased and that they don't want to send women for training is true. Training has been going on at Onepusu and other Bible training centres but no woman from here ever went there. As a pastor, I see this as a good thing not to send women for Bible training so that the position of leadership is controlled by men. For us we did not see it as a good thing to have women's leadership here in the church (Interview, E. Ahukela, 7, September 2015).

The pastor's negative reaction to the village women's desire to be trained in one of the SSEC Bible colleges, has demonstrated the inherent Small Malaitan indigenous gendered roles, that "leadership is men's business" (Soaki, 2017) and it is not customary to see women taking up leadership positions in the village. For pastor Ahukela, any move towards

giving opportunities to local women to be trained, would certainly cause a break with the tradition he has inherited from the chiefly authority he wanted to maintain. While the local pastor-chief admitted that their action stands in contrast to SSEC fundamental beliefs in the equality of people, the local pastor maintained this stance.

It is true that the SSEC has a statement of faith which eliminates custom and the cultural traditions, and that it rules for our faithfulness on the Bible as the absolute word of God. It's true that the Bible speaks about the equality of men and women and that the call for service and vocation really depends on God. However, here at Riverside local church, our faith and belief at this point in time are that respect for *Alahanga* and culture must remain in the church. If a woman says anything in the church, she must obtain prior permission from the elders of the church especially men (Interview, E. Ahukela, 7 September 2015).

This statement by the pastor and chief Ahukela demonstrates the ongoing state of discrimination women face in everyday life. While some changes have occurred in the distant past, the SSEC in Small Malaita has continued to emphasise the importance of the local culture and its rule in the church. There is a strong emphasis on the social order in the church. Social order in the church can only be maintained when there is a separation between men and women. However, this situation creates a contradiction for the church obligation to maintain the equality of men and women as a fundamentally Christian imperative.

The foregoing discussions confirm that the subordination of women in the SSEC and the ACOM is highly prevalent in Small Malaita. Research data have shown evidence of influences on the church both at the local and national levels that consequently affects the manner in which local church authorities theorise the roles and status of women in the church. The influence of the traditional cultural and religious beliefs, together with the literal and fundamental traditional indigenous interpretations of the Bible has provided a base for the continuous subordination of women.

The Local Church Women and Empowerment

While the previous sections have shown a certain degree of subordination of women concerning roles within the SSEC and the ACOM, there is a varying degree of ethnographic evidence to support a state of Church-domestic empowerment. The theme Church-domestic empowerment concerns the nature of power and the spectrum within

which it functions in terms of “power to” as opposed to “power over” (Misra, 2006). In this context, SSEC women lack political or social “power to” confront the patriarchal authority of the church or even to act outside of its authority. This is because the Women’s Fellowship is historically a feminine space formed to nurture a Christian model of womanhood. However, following Nirshur-UI-Hug (2005), the nature of empowerment of SSEC women realises “participation and often the openness to other women that in one way or the other help to meet some needs of the women” (Hug, 2005:113). In essence, the ACOM women realise empowerment through their simple faith, believing that Mothers’ Union is designated by God to enhance a ministry that nurtures Christian family life. They ensure the symbolic presence of Lady Mary and her values of love and care are played out through the cultural model of *teitee diana* (motherhood), a powerful model in Small Malaita (see Hermkens, 2007). In a way, while the SSEC and the ACOM local women may have drawn respect from local communities due to their social roles in the homes and in local church communities, their simple faith in God, and their respective church women’s groups have also provided effective agencies for women’s empowerment in Small Malaita.

Empowerment is about participation of people in their own development, self-help or for social change (Kahn & Bender, 1985). Often local church women speak of the social and spiritual transformation realised through the Women’s Fellowship activities (Dickson-Waiko, 2003; Douglas, 2003; Paini, 2003; Pollard, 2003). In essence, transformation is a platform for empowerment.

The field data have shown a number of key themes that imply the essence of empowerment within the domestic space of the church. The sub-themes were developed from the common local descriptions given by the women research participants. The knowledge and recitation of the common Biblical texts and simple theological meanings provide a powerful platform for women to negotiate and address their own family crises. The accounts that follow are based on the personal interviews I conducted with the local women in three large SSEC communities, and villages in Sa’a parish on Small Malaita.

Asunge a Masta (Master’s Work)

While the church segregates and undermines the prospect of women sharing equal opportunity with men in leadership and decision making, it has provided certain

empowering avenues for women. One of the ways through which women are empowered is through education, but this appears to vary from one church to another. Unlike other missionary evangelism strategies, where education comes first, one of the policies of the QKM-SSEM (SSEC) which guided its mission work was “saved to serve” (Pollard, 2006). Fundamentally, the imperative was that education came as the result of conversion. First, men and women must be taught to believe in God, renounce the old ways of life, be baptised and become a Christian. Education comes after the empowerment of Christian converts to understand more of the faith through learning to read the Bible in English, sing English hymns, and use certain English words during Bible study sessions and personal faith sharing. This Christian modelling appears to be powerful among local women. Women approach and interpret the social world fundamentally through their personal faith in God, supported by their understanding of a few selective Biblical passages.

Betty is about 55 years old and lives with her brothers and relatives at Weii’o, a small SSEC village along the valley up in the mountainous interior of Small Malaita. Weii’o has less than ten households but at the centre of the village lies a small church. Betty is not married but has a brother and two sisters, all of whom are married. Their father was a local church pastor and in his very old age, he was in a dilemma as to who should replace him because his son was not in the village for him to pass on to him the leadership of the local church. The only option was to hand over the role to Betty who, like most of the local unmarried women in Small Malaita, lived with her parents and spent her life in the village without going out to other villages or to the city.

My father was a pastor in our village. At his old age, he had no one to replace him, so he said to me, ‘no one is here, and you are to take up this position as a pastor. You take the ‘*Masta’s* work’ in my place.’ I believe in the *Mama’a ta’i lengi* (father in heaven) will lead me in this work (Interview, Betty, 1 September 2015).

With a very strong look at me, Betty affirmed that she has a strong faith and belief that the father in heaven, referred to as *Masta*, will lead her. Unlike other mainstream churches which normally used the formal names such as God or Jesus Christ, the SSEC uses these names interchangeably with *Masta* or *ini maa’i* (holy one) or God as *mama’a ta’i lengi* (the father in heaven). Without pointing to the other reasons for her to take on the leadership role, such as obedience to her father and the fact that no man was around to become the

village pastor, she referred to her faith in the power of the *Masta*. Among the SSEC local women such a statement is highly obvious.

Up until the 1970s, most Small Malaita women did not receive modern education. In the SSEC, women learned to read and memorise Bible verses and common hymns through the activities of the Women's Band (Women's Fellowship). Although they are largely illiterate, their knowledge of the Bible verses can amaze an outsider visitor.

I went to a Bible school there at Su'upeine-Canaan. You know at that time, I didn't know how to read well. My uncle Teapaine came and took me to the school. There he taught me how to read⁴⁶. We did the question and answer book and later I attended the courses. I think if I attended the schools that the children attended today that would be good to help me in reading (Interview, Betty, 1 September 2015).

Betty may have been involved in the Women's Band (Women's Fellowship) activities before she was taken to Canaan Bible School for further training in Bible reading and other courses. Her faith orientation and simple literacy began at home and going on to a Bible school increased her faith and understanding of the Bible. Yet, Bible training in such schools as Canaan could improve student learning if they had some early education such as at preschools, primary and even secondary schools, prior to attending Bible schools. However, as Betty affirms, it is not only an ordinary literacy education that empowers people and makes a difference, it is the *Masta's* inspiration.

But what I did during that time was a small basic reading and then prayed to *Masta* to give me some knowledge about his word, even if they are not deeper. I started to read and recognized the names of men in the Bible. That was what I did. I tried hard to at least read the word of *Masta* (Interview, Betty, 1 September 2015).

Reciprocity is fundamental here for empowerment. Betty's radiance of her faith has taken a strong hold that empowers her to push forward even though she faced the problem of illiteracy and could not read the Bible well enough to give a clear interpretation of what it says and what the *Masta* has to say to the local congregation. However, her faith and reliance on the *Masta* to make her work possible is a source of strength due to a reciprocal relationship between Betty and the *Masta*.

⁴⁶ Literacy lessons that were taught during the early 1970s was basically focused on the vowels *a e i o u* where learners were taught how to put them together to make a word. It was not similar to modern literacy learning.

But I have the strong belief that *Masta* will help me because I gave my life to him. So even though I didn't know anything, the *Masta* has given me ideas and things to give to my people where I am leading [*tears rolling down her eyes as she talked...*] I know that the *Masta* has blessed me with a lot of blessings. I have many blessings when I worked as a pastor. I feel good and, on many occasions, the difficult words that I normally could not read, I could read them well by this time. Now I could read the Bible and found it easy to explain it to my people (Interview, Betty, 1 September 2015).

Reciprocally, according to Betty, blessings flowed in various forms. It came through literacy and clarity of meanings that were drawn from the Bible. The Bible is difficult to read and comprehend but now it is easy to read, and the meanings of the texts are easy to explain to the people. Hence the *Masta* remained Betty's source of strength to face the challenges of leadership as a woman.

Although I am a woman, but the *Masta* has led me and given me power to do his work. I faced many challenges with the wisdom and strength he gave me and managed to face the problems and succeeded in the end. I faced so many problems but the *Masta* has blessed me and led me through to the other side of life (Interview, Betty, 1 September 2015).

Betty felt quite emotional about her experiences and the difficulties she faced as a woman. Yet due to her reliance on the power of the *Masta*, she said that she had succeeded. She has not been able to explain further what types of difficulties she faced.

Mary, a member of Sa'a Mothers' Union shared similar experience to Betty in terms of the empowerment, brought about through simple faith realised when doing the *Masta* or *Li'oa*⁴⁷ (God) work. Although Mary was not catechist, a position in ACOM similar to pastor in SSEC, she used to serve at the sanctuary during Holy Eucharists especially on Mothers' Union gatherings. Mary is in her late 50s and is married with grown-up children. Like Betty, Mary is illiterate and had never been to school like other Small Malaita women in the 1970s. However, her journey of development and confidence began when he joined the Mothers' Union.

It took me some time to fully understand the work of the Mothers' Union. But now I have learned it well. I started obeying our leaders and then learned how to say prayers. For the first time, I said a

⁴⁷ Note that the SSEC normally use the English term *Master* or *Masta* to refer to God or Jesus. The ACOM members use the local term *Li'oa* to refer to God.

prayer by myself, I feel very different. I said the prayers without knowing how to read a single letter (Interview, Mary, 22 February 2015).

Beyond that, Mary confidently stepped forward to claim confidence that the work she is doing is for *Li'oa* (God) despite the public negativity of women stepping into the sanctuary.

When I serve in front of the people at the sanctuary, I feel good. Although I know some people were not happy to see us women at the *leu maa'i* (holy sanctuary) serving there. But for me, I have no fear because I know that I am working for *Li'oa* (God) not you people (Interview, Mary, 22 February 2015).

Her simple faith and confidence has reproduced a kind of power that enabled healing of her feet to allow her to walk in the male sacred space, *leu ma'ai*.

I feel that I am now in the presence of *Li'oa* (God). I feel that power that was why even I feel very bad with my feet and quite sick earlier, but now I felt better. I am now well and serving in the sanctuary (Interview, Mary, 22 February 2015).

Betty and Mary's life stories demonstrate how the personal and social empowerment of local women is realised through the work of church women's groups as a vehicle for female agency. Christian conviction which, in many cases is nurtured by the local church women's groups has always provided for meaningful empowerment for local women. The case of Mary is a fine example of that.

The eight years of Betty's leadership as a pastor with the local SSEC church of Waii'o has illustrates the faith-based empowerment that challenges the SSEC church tradition and cultural framework of Small Malaita. Betty's initial appointment as the local pastor bypassed the SSEC procedures and was done within a family structure, to respond to a situation where men were not available to take on leadership immediately. While Betty's response and interpretation of the process of becoming a pastor was built on her father's advice, she also claimed that her call was the *Masta's* initiative of vocation and gift. Although she faced up to so many challenges because she is not educated and is a woman serving within the Christian tradition where only men are pastors, Betty is empowered by her faith in challenging conventional beliefs about women that both the SSEC and the indigenous culture maintain.

***Teitee* (Motherhood)**

Although there is a trend in development studies that tends to prioritise women's empowerment and attempts to see women become independent and take control of their lives (Scheyvens, 2003), the Sa'a women capitalise on their local Mothers' Union work, and the cultural gendered values to reassert themselves, and negotiate an agency that is conducive and appropriate to village-based empowerment. In many cases, the local women's approach has contrasted with the development theorist argument which has stated that the missionary-induced women's programmes such as household management, sewing, art and craft, and childcare would only reinforce their passive agency from genuine empowerment (Douglas, 2003; Jolly, 2003; Scheyvens, 2003:27).

While the dominant character of church patriarchy toward women is prevalent, the local women have embraced the Mothers' Union as the only agency through which transformation and empowerment could be realised by them (See Barker & Hermkens, 2016). This has been cultivated through the cultural notion of *teitee* (mother). The Mothers' Union has been more identified and recognised through the value of *teitee* or motherhood. This has given a privileged advantage for women members of the Mothers' Union to build an agency for their confidence, empowerment and development in leadership.

As I can see, for sure the work of the Mothers' Union really strengthens and empowers us women in the village. There are some changes now. The women who joined the Mothers' Union are *a'ai la'a* (strong) and *ka'a sai me'u* (brave or confident) to stand and show the way of the Mothers' Union they follow. It is because people know that we are *teitee* (Mother) (Interview, Agnes, 28 February 2015).

The discussions that follow have demonstrated the women's personal experience of transformation. However, such experience of transformation has not confronted the patriarchal structure of female segregation, but has instead negotiated it (see Kandiyoti, 1988; Gerami & Lehnerer, 2001; Scheyvens, 2003).

Confidence and developing leadership capabilities in the church community is one of the vital forms of empowerment realised by the Mothers' Union. Although women work under a number of constraining factors, the Mothers' Union has provided a platform for confidence building and improved leadership through its teaching and programme of activities. For instance, the data has shown that the work of the Mothers' Union does not

only empower the local women's participation in church but exceeds it and also empowers the cultural roles of chief's wives as well.

Elam is a member of Mothers' Union and married to one of the local chiefs. She is a very active woman. Although she did not reach secondary school education level she appears to be assertive and active in the Mothers' Union work. Despite her low educational background, she has been a Mothers' Union leader in her own village group for a number of years. Elam is from North Malaita, and given the cultural difference, she has to take the challenge of performing to the cultural expectation of a chief's wife.

I am from North Malaita and when I married in this family, life was difficult because I don't know the culture of this place and the general expectations in the family. So, after I joined the Mothers' Union I started to feel confident in how to live in this *nume* (house). Before I joined the Mothers' Union, I find it difficult to live as a *toro* (chief's wife), a woman in this *nume* (house). But then, I started to understand how to deal with custom things (Interview, Elam, 9 March 2015).

In Small Malaita, there is a general expectation that women have to ensure an orderly house, *oke so'okone nume ioe purine okesi isita huni esu ta'i sinaha nana ruruha* (you must put your house in order before you could go out to work for other people). *Nume* (house) has a significant symbolic meaning in the local culture. It is the basis for success and advancement. It is not a physical accommodation, but a socio-religious institution where local custom teachings, rituals and cultural behaviours are taught. It is where sacred stories and genealogical histories are imparted, and teaching about life is explored. Each *nume* has its own pattern of life. In Small Malaita *nume ni alaha* (chief's house) has an important role to play in ensuring that the immediate community is well guided, culturally, morally and even spiritually. In essence, the wife therefore mirrors the virtues of the *nume*. She has to be a living example of *hu'e* (married woman).

From the outset, it is clear why Elam felt incompetent when she married and entered the *nume ni alaha* for the first time. Coupled with the fact that she is from Lau, a distinct cultural group from Small Malaita, the high expectation to perform as a chief's wife has constrained her. Elam is challenged by the fact that she has to perform her roles as chief's wife not only to keep the cultural protocols of the *nume ni alaha* (chief's house) but to advise the local village people and her husband. In this circumstance, Elam has found support in the empowering influence of the Mothers' Union and its contribution to her roles as the chief's wife.

As you know, I got married to one of the chiefs in this place. And when I arrived, I found it too difficult to talk to the people or advise anybody when I see the need to do it. Now I have the confidence to advise, plan or even talk directly to stop someone who is not doing the right thing according to our custom (Interview, Elam, 9 March 2015).

It is an empowering experience for Elam. She has a composite leader's role as a chief's wife and also a village Mothers' Union leader. Although it is very challenging to live up to the expectations of these leadership roles, Elam has found comfort and confidence in the Mothers' Union's teaching to perform these roles.

Now as wife of a chief, a Mothers Union leader, and village woman, I find it very challenging, but I feel that I am different now because through my participation in the Mothers Union, I now have the confidence in leadership in the *nume ni alaha* (chief's house) and of Mothers' Union group. I am different now (Interview, Elam, 9 March 2015).

The work of the Mothers' Union not only empowers Elam in terms of leadership, but also transformed her personal life to cooperate with her husband, to listen and humble herself.

There were times in the past we used to have arguments. And the arguments were about the custom rules and the cultural expectation of women. But then after I joined the Mothers' Union, I began to cool down and listen to what my husband had to say. In many ways, I have learned a lot because I can be able to have the patience to listen to my husband's ideas and teaching. So, we have now settled, and he accepts my views and I do the same to him. I started to help him in his role as a chief. At times, I have to advise him against tough decisions and even bad decisions that sometimes, out of frustrations he wanted to make. I am happy now that although I am from a different cultural background, he has confidence in me and listens to my advice most of the time (Interview, Elam, 9 March 2015).

These narratives have shown that, in many cases, the Mothers' Union as a women's organisation has provided an agency for empowerment of local women to have confidence in themselves to take the lead. More significantly in the case of public leadership, women are able to act as advisors to their husbands who are chiefs in their leadership roles and decision-making (Grimshaw, 1989). This can be seen in the case of Margaret, who has stepped forward to represent her husband in his capacity as chief to perform his roles. However, as Elam and Margaret have clearly confirmed, their popularity, trust and capacity building to perform effectively as chiefs' wives, is built on the Mothers' Union.

Power to Manage Marriage crisis

The power to manage marriage relationship crises is often effective within the church. The women's connection to the church, through the Women's Fellowship programmes empowers them to deal with marriage crises. In the SSEC, such boldness comes through the women's translation of their personal faith. I present two accounts of Andy, an elderly member of the SSEC Women's Fellowship, and Matilda, a member of the Mothers' Union.

Andy is 62 years old, an active member of the Women's Fellowship. She was born into a heathen family but soon after the SSEC arrived at her village at Roone, her family were converted including herself. Later, her father attended Onepusu Bible School in the early 1940s and became a pastor in one of the local villages above Roone. He had a strong personality and continued to teach his children until he died.

Andy's marriage was arranged and her parents only gave permission for her to marry an Anglican man who lived at a neighbouring village. They have five children but in the course of the marriage, Andy alleged that her husband was a very cruel man. He was violent and used to ridicule the SSEC church in front of her. Their marriage ended in divorce and Andy returned to her natal village but continued being an active member of the Women's Fellowship. She spoke to me about how she managed the crises of her marital relationship through her personal faith and the church teaching of her father.

Andy: I joined the Women's Band when I was very young. Damu took it to us. After she returned from her training at Afio, we started going to the altar to sit, take *lesin* (lesson) and *poen* (point). I took *poen* too. So I believe in God and saw that he is real because of the things he did to me (Interview, Andy, 27 July 2015).

Andy's faith in God was built on the *lesin* and *poen* she had learned to memorise and applied. The early SSEM has published a book, *Bible Outline* that has tailored the Christian education of women to a well guided framework of interpretation, meaning and life applications. The *lesin* are the selected Biblical topics to be learned, and the *poen* are the life application of the topics. SSEC women were strictly taught through these processes, and at some point everyone is expected to memorise them and are trained to confidently express their faith in public. Andy spoke to me about the crises of her marriage and the difficulties she went through under an oppressive husband.

I married to someone at Fanalei [name withheld] and today he divorced me. My parents allowed me to marry this man. He pulled

me into bad things. Nevertheless, I keep praying for him. He said “*ufala SSEC you fala olsem klub nomo*” (SSEC is just like a club). He used to ask me “do you know what letter S stands for?” “It stands for SATAN”. When I heard this my heart cried because my father and mother were both SSEC Christians. I didn’t see those attitudes. I was born in a Christian family and I was like ‘full’ of the good things. My father taught us about the word of the ‘holy one’, nothing else (Interview, Andy, 27 July 2015).

One of the difficulties women suffer in Solomon Islands results from marriage to a man from a different church denomination, and her husband then criticises her own church. In most cases women follow their husbands into his church but, in some cases, it is the other way round. To avoid family problems, the husband follows his wife if he sees that his wife won’t give up her church. Although there are exceptions, church affiliation can cause marriage problems. In the case of Andy, her church was ridiculed right in front of her, naming it as satanic. Andy was in such pain, referring to it as “heart cry”, when she recalled the Christian home environment she was brought up in. To her, she was “full of it” and any criticism of her church would deeply sadden her. Such spiritual experiences and public claims are highly visible among evangelical Christians. As a public attestation of her faith, Andy insisted on praying for her husband to change despite the psychological pain she went through.

At one time, he asked me to attend the church services at the SSEC Central church in Honiara. Later he stopped me again from attending the SSEC service but allowed me to attend the church service at the Anglican Church at Bishop’s dale. Then I asked if I could join the Mother’s Union, but then he stopped me again. So after a long time of praying for him, he just allowed me to go to my own church, SSEC (Interview, Andy, 27 July 2015).

In many critical circumstances like this, women suffer a lot. There has been a strong belief that when bride price has been paid for a woman to marry a man, it legitimates the relationship and the authority of the husband over his wife. For SSEC women, challenging a husband openly is rarely done, but instead the power to challenge him is considered and practised through prayer. It is a belief that the *Masta* watches every situation and through constant prayer and faithfulness to God’s words, every bad situation will be resolved. Although Andy is critical of her husband’s oppressive attitude, her faith empowers her to pray for her husband and remain resistant in prayer.

So, in my experience, I am really happy. I have seen God and Jesus. The things that confronted me, I did overcome them. I put Jesus in

front of me. The Women's Band [now women's Fellowship] really helped me in this time (Interview, Andy, 27 July 2015).

Like Andy, Cathy was born as an Anglican Christian. But her life after marriage was described as *inoni aela* (bad person).

In the past *ineu inoni aela* (I am a bad person). I mean I don't know anything about the church and the teachings about a Christian mother. The only teaching I know were custom teachings which my parents have taught me. I seemed not to be care about anything. My life was different compared to now (Interview, Cathy, 20 March 2015).

During the course of the interview, Cathy finally revealed what she meant by describing herself as *inoni aela* (bad person).

You know my husband is not a good man. He had an affair with other women. It was like his attitude. That really caused me a lot of problems. We used to fight, and on many occasions, I tore down the thatched walls of our houses and destroyed all our kitchen utensils such as pots, plates and cups. I used to burn his clothes as well. I could imagine it was a real mess (Interview, Cathy, 20 March 2015).

Unlike Andy, Cathy's life was bad because of her husband's extramarital affairs with other women. Although her husband was such a humble man and did not abuse her, his love affairs had destroyed Cathy's life and went on for a while. For Cathy, the influential work of the village Mothers' Union has changed her life. She had struggled to manage the crises of her relationship especially with her husband because of his continued affairs with other women.

But when I join the Mothers' Union, I started to learn to control my anger and later decided not to bother myself with my husband's attitude. He continued having affairs with the same women, but that didn't bother me anymore. I kept praying for him all the times despite [him] being unfaithful to our marriage (Interview, Cathy, 20 March 2015).

Extramarital affairs in Small Malaita have been one of the growing problems that have continued to endanger many marriages and families in Small Malaita. It causes family violence and threatens the peace of the home. In reality, Cathy's positive change of attitude towards her unfaithful husband was a challenging encounter, but for her, change was made

possible due to her active participation in the Mothers' Union. The Mothers' Union has provided an agency for change in the village.

Personal change has its impact on the family as well. Here Cathy's change of life has impacted her husband's life and family. He has changed his attitude from being an unfaithful husband to taking a leadership role in the local community church.

After all, he has changed his life and became a catechist for our village. He had served as catechist for 35 years until he was too old and could not be able to continue with his work. He finished being a catechist a few years before he died. Timo our new catechist came to work with him (Interview, Cathy, 20 March 2015).

Cathy's decision to change impacted her husband to follow her and become engaged in church work. He took on the role of local village catechist up to his old age before he died. His personal life transformation has allowed him to remain supportive of his wife and her role in the Mothers' Union.

After he changed his life, he was very supportive of my work. He used to prepare my basket, and allowed me to go and attended meetings, and even if I stayed too long for a few days, he won't be angry with me. He won't be angry with me because I changed his life (Interview, Cathy, 20 March 2015).

The change that occurred in Cathy and her husband's lives was powerful. The family has become empowered, and thus became an agency of empowerment for individual family members. As Cathy has rightly stated, change has brought about empowerment and a new sense of feeling and renewed relationship at home.

Both of us engaged in church works at that time. While he was a catechist, I served as a leader in the Mothers' Union... So, while I find happiness, I also discovered some feeling of power and freedom in me and my husband. That power led us to support each other for the last 35 years. You know well when you came to us when we were working at Mwaniadje (Interview, Cathy, 20 March 2015).

Andy's life experience and the enduring power to manage her marriage demonstrate the power of the church to empower women. Like other churches and denominations, the interpretation of faith and the Bible give identity to the Christian convert. Women's Band is responsible for framing the application of the Bible and empowering women during marital and social crises in the local church community.

Empowering Personal Transformation

The data show evidence of personal life empowerment for rural SSEC and ACOM women. A number of women participants I have interviewed have spoken of how the church through the women's Band (Women's Fellowship) and the Mothers' Union have transformed their lives not only by managing marriage and family crises but by coping with the need for confidence in public roles. Susan, a member of the SSEC Women's Fellowship, and Matilda, a member of the Mothers' Union shared their personal life stories.

Susan is about 56 years old. She is married with five children, all of them were grown-up and some of them have married. She did not attend school but stayed with their parents until she got married. Susan's husband used to claim himself as a *kastom* man who is knowledgeable of the local culture, but Susan told me that he is a Christian backslider who has not attended church for many years. For the SSEC, a backslider is someone who is baptised but over years has not remained faithful to the church rules, such as bans on tobacco and alcohol, and participates in mortuary feasts and bride price exchanges. Susan's husband is such a person. He never accompanied her for gardening or attended to household duties such as cooking or cutting firewood. His main task every day is fishing. I never met him during my field research; however, I was told that he travelled to Honiara and has stayed there with a relative for almost two years now, although he promised Susan that he would return shortly.

Matilda is 60 years old and although she was born in an Anglican Christian family, she is not an active Christian woman. She had a second marriage after her husband died. Her two daughters of the first marriage had grown up and have already got married.

For Matilda, although her husband was initially a gentle man and was not aggressive like Susan's husband, he has often been jealous of Matilda and had been critical of her. He lived with Matilda most of the time, and had never been to Honiara or any other place beyond Small Malaita and Malaita.

Situations such as this are common in Small Malaita, but like other local SSEC women, and the ACOM, although Susan and Matilda suffered a lot, their determination and sense of empowerment to manage the situation is maintained by their personal faith, literacy, and

the encouragement they received through their membership and participation in the local SSEC Women's Band.

We did the *saen-saen* (shine-shine). We visited the women who have just given birth to babies. We used to help bring local food, carry water, firewood to them. This was during our generation of women (Interview, Susan, 26 July 2015).

By participating in the popular Women's Band *saen-saen* programmes, women come to realise the importance of becoming obedient and faithful. The *saen-saen* programme refers to the practical application of Christian witness. It draws its meaning from the Biblical passage in Matthew 5:16 which says, "Let your light shine before others so that they see your good works and give glory to your father who is in heaven". Historically, this formed part of the important feminine obligation for the *Fiku ana kini* when it was started in the early 1930s and 1940s (Pollard, 2006). By participating in the programme, women are empowered with the excitement of fulfilling their Christian duties and being collectively bonded. Susan has seen this as a departure point for her personal liberation and transformation.

As Susan greeted me in the normal Small Malaita custom, she told me that her granddaughter was preparing some local food for me while we were talking.

We did the *saen-saen* (shine-shine). We visited the women who have just given birth to babies. We used to help bring local food, carry water, firewood to them. This was during our generation of women. So, we engaged in those work *pwapwa* [*she smiles and raises her voice*]. I hold on strongly to the Women's Band. My life was really good as I worked together with other women. If they give me any responsibilities, I will never turn it down or become lazy to do them. I hold on and take part in all the women's activities such as the Mothers' Day celebrations. Similar things such as those that the Mothers' Union of the Anglican Church used to do. We were secret friends. I remember we did one with the Mothers' Union at Ruapu. I hold on until this year [2015] and I feel down because of old age (Interview, Susan, 26 July 2015).

For Susan, obedience to the responsibilities given to her by her Women's Band, and engaging in the inter-church women's groups activities, such as secret friends and the Mother's Day celebration with the Anglican Mothers' Union group at Ruapu, was an empowering and life-transforming experience, mirroring Scheyvens' (2003) findings among the Roman Catholic Church women's groups, and McDougall's (2003) among the Ranongga United Church Women's Fellowship.

But given her poor literacy and family background, Susan admitted that life was difficult and it was through the *Masta's* power, whose messages were reinforced through the Women's Band, that she experienced a personal transformation that raised her confidence. First, it gave her confidence to stand in public and take leadership in a church service, the activities that she did not do in the past.

I did everything. Sometimes during our outreach visit to Heupotasi, Likimaea or Bulu [SSEC main villages], I take the lead in the 'choruses' and 'pray over offerings' (Interview, Susan, 26 July 2015).

Taking leadership of such an outreach Women's Fellowship service demands a lot of confidence. Evangelical conventions such as those that Susan was referring to here would attract a large congregation of women from the neighbouring SSEC villages, as well as men. I observed a number of SSEC women's fellowship outreach services and it is quite evident that an uneducated woman such as Susan could find it difficult. Nevertheless, Susan was bold about it as she explained:

You know all these things? The Holy Spirit seems to be lifting my heart and life...*pwapwa* (grandchild). You cannot do those things on your own without the Spirit of God. We are filled of it. We are filled of God that has anointed us. That is why I was not *masa* (shame or embarrass). Even if the church is full, I will never be ashamed to take up these works such as leading the choruses and saying payers (Interview, Susan, 26 July 2015).

Susan's description of herself and other women as being agents through the power of the Holy Spirit filling or energising them clearly points to the social reality of the powerlessness of women in Small Malaita. Women would be powerless to take on any leadership roles in the church with confidence without the filling of this Spirit. Susan touches on the spiritual empowerment in the SSEC that drives women to express themselves within the church social domestic arena. Because of the power dynamics, she was filled and raised to participate in leadership of the service without being ashamed.

To Matilda, her participation in engaging in church activities is a significant mark of transformation and development in her life.

I always feel very happy and excited whenever we go out to attend our meetings and festivals related to St Mary. It is like seeing the Lord. It is a different life experience altogether. Sometimes, before we actually travel to another village to attend our festival days, even if I feel quite unwell, when we actually go, I started to

feel well. And when we got to the village I feel that I am already recovered (Interview, Matilda, 22 February 2015).

It was another step forward and a new experience for Matilda to actually serve in the sanctuary. By Anglican tradition only men serve in the sanctuary with a priest presiding at the Eucharist. However, although the tradition has begun to change in some villages, most of the local villages in Small Malaita do not accept women to serve at the sanctuary, resonating with the indigenous belief that women are polluted and it is *apu* to enter the place of sacrifice (Burt, 1994; Keesing, 1989). On special occasions, such as the festival days of the Mothers' Union, women could serve at the sanctuary, yet there is a general reluctance on the part of the male church leaders and village elders to accept women at the sanctuary. A distinction has to be made here. Women are only allowed work at the sanctuary through their collective identity as a Mothers' Union group, and not as individual women.

If I am asked to serve at the sanctuary, during the service with other women, I am always willing. It surprised me because my feet were not well that I could stand bare-footed on the floor. But when I was actually serving there, I feel free as though nothing is wrong with my feet. It seems like *salunge* (pain) has left me during my time at the sanctuary and returned after I finished serving (Interview, Matilda, 22 February 2015).

Salunge (pain) could not suppress her desire to serve at the Sanctuary. I met Matilda and could see that she could barely walk without foot-wear. Without foot-wear such as slippers, she could not walk around even on a concrete floor. Her simple conviction that she is doing this task as a sacred vocation for *Li'oa*, (God) has convinced her to resist the traditional views and beliefs of *apu*.

Beyond that, Matilda confidently stepped forward to claim confidence that the work she is doing is for *Li'oa* (God) despite the public negativity of women stepping into the sanctuary.

When I serve in front of the people at the sanctuary, I feel good. Although I know some people were not happy to see us women at the *leu maa'i* (holy sanctuary) serving there. But for me, I have no fear because I know that I am working for *Li'oa* (God) not you people (Interview, Matilda, 22 February 2015).

Her deep faith and confidence have reproduced a kind of power that enabled healing of her feet to allow her to walk in the male sacred space, *leu ma'ai*.

I feel that I am now in the presence of *Lio'a* (God). I feel that power that was why even I feel very bad with my feet and quite

sick earlier, but now I felt better. I am now well and serving in the sanctuary (Interview, Matilda, 22 February 2015).

Matilda's personal life story has demonstrated an example of how the personal and social empowerment of local women is realised through the work of the Mothers' Union as a vehicle for female agency. Simple Christian conviction which, in many cases is nurtured by the local church women's groups has always provided for meaningful empowerment for local people. The case of Matilda is a fine example of that.

Although Susan and Matilda have different church affiliations, and family crisis situations, their accounts demonstrate typical examples of how local women can be empowered through their own simple faith and theological understanding to negotiate and navigate through fear and oppressive situation in church community context. Susan and Matilda were seen to have risen over their challenges building on the strength of her faith brought about by their strong affiliations to their respective church women's groups.

Conclusion

Small Malaitan cultural beliefs have a strong impact on both the SSEC and the ACOM in terms of gender relations, and in particular leadership roles. Men are usually assigned to assume formal public leadership in the church, while women take on leadership roles in local church women's groups, and their respective fellowship groups. This is irrespective of a number of women who have been highly trained and qualified in Biblical and theological studies (to the same extent as many men). This has been the impact of local cultural beliefs and influences. However, while women experience inequality in local church communities, alternatively, local church women have continued to utilise culture and Biblical frameworks to provide agency for personal and collective empowerment. The local women's empowerment draws on both Christian, and indigenous cultural beliefs, assumptions and practices, although they do not necessarily hold contemporary liberal notions of empowerment.

Chapter 7: Comparative Analysis: The Dynamics of Gender Relations and Women's Empowerment in the SSEC and the ACOM

Introduction

The Women's Fellowship of the SSEC, and the Mothers' Union of the ACOM reveal that the churches have been strongly influenced by local cultural beliefs, and the history of missionisation and colonialism and its accompanying philosophies and practices. To illuminate the differences and similarities of the interplay of these dynamics and their influence on local women in the church communities, this chapter moves to a comparative analysis, examining their experiences. Here, the comparison of the experiences of local women in the SSEC and the ACOM are discussed together, drawing from the earlier case studies in chapters four and six. Specific focus is given to gender relations and women's empowerment, patriarchy, and the social beliefs about the women's roles and status in the rural church context.

The two case studies show varying degrees of differences, divergence of church doctrines and structures, and the approaches to local culture and the social world. This variation depicted the magnitude of the missionary's respective perception of the role of the church in society, and the people, particularly the men's and women's roles in the Christian community. However, drawing critically on the analysis of the ethnographic data of women's experience and personal life-stories in both SSEC and ACOM communities, it is clear that local church women in both churches suffered similar constraints despite the inherent differences. Relevant literature has shown changes and reconfiguration of gendered roles, subsequent to the intersection of local culture, missionary and colonial influences on the church concerning the roles and social status of women in local church communities. Here I further argue that the entanglement of the missionary and colonial conceptualisations of a distinctive gendered-male/female education syllabus, has consequently marginalised local women from a general education syllabus, but aligned a feminine-gendered education that focused toward an ideal of womanhood and Christian domesticity (see Pollard, 2000; Jolly & Macintyre, 1989; Choi & Jolly, 2014; Soaki, 2017). Furthermore, the privileged status of men in education, realigned them to a new pattern of work created by missionary and colonial regimes, geared towards public leadership roles. The change has pushed women into the confine of the domestic sphere, framed within

Christian views of womanhood and domesticity. However, I further argue that gender relations within a church setting fluctuates and is polarised between constraints and empowerment. While local women experience discrimination and low status in their own church communities, they have continued to draw upon local cultural and Christian frameworks for their own empowerment, development and emancipation.

Gender relations and women's empowerment, which set the framework of the empirical discussion in the two case studies, will be further evaluated in this chapter. The chapter concludes with a comparative exploration about how a particular women's group engaged with the process of negotiation in an attempt to empower themselves to deal with family and collective challenges in their own community context.

The SSEC and the ACOM Women's Experience Compared

The much-anticipated missionary objective for the emancipation of local women from cultural constraints is far from being realised (Jolly & Macintyre, 1989; Douglas, 2003; Pollard, 2003; Choi & Jolly 2014). European missionaries established pathways to improve the livelihoods of local women by introducing new household skills, European ways of childcare, and personal hygiene. They provided for the education of local young women by introducing Girl Guides and Women's Clubs, and through them have introduced new ways of domestic training which have the effect of empowering local women (see Pollard, 2006; Maetala & Pollard, 2009). While women seem to increasingly excel in certain senior management and administrative leadership positions within the national government (Liki, 2010), in the NGOs and private companies, there have not been any clear strategic pathways for the improvement of gender relations in the church, particularly in the SSEC and the ACOM, whereby women could assume formal leadership positions. There is a clear disparity in gender relations, whereby women are being pushed into domestic responsibilities, while men assume public leadership. On the whole, it appears that both churches have transferred the indigenous gender relations ideology and social practice into the church, with certain modifications.

Comparatively, it is evident that the current gender relations, and more specifically, the roles women play and the space they occupy in both the SSEC and the ACOM communities were largely shaped by early expatriate missionary philosophies and practices. This pattern of gender discrimination may have resulted from the impact of the missionaries' own local

cultural experience and beliefs about women being infused into the church (cf. Moore, 1988; Strathern, 1988). Furthermore, the powerful influence of local cultural beliefs about women and the social expectations about gendered roles have been a dilemma for the churches.

The compatibility of early missionary ideologies with expectations about women's roles and their positions in church and society has reinforced local cultural gender relations and resulted in socio-religious beliefs and expectations. Consequently, the current state of gender inequality and the discriminatory attitude towards women has been a direct consequence of that.

Apart from offering specific academic subjects and Christian teaching, the focus of women's education was to enhance a model of *kiki'i huni pe'i* (helping hands). The education focus was on the subordination of women to the leadership and headship of the husband or the prospective husband. The objective and model of training women stood out clearly, with the SSEM and the Melanesian Mission, when the missionaries recruited local women for training.

Their training programmes were characterised by the necessary skills and knowledge suitable to the new Christian home environment. The missionary ideology about women's roles has been further supported and enhanced by the social, cultural and religious beliefs of the local culture. Women were socially encoded and defined as *ka'a malisi* (unsuitable) for roles beyond the home. Instead women were *malisi* (suitable) only for the supportive roles to her husband, and the general household chores, and other social responsibilities in the local church communities.

This gendered-role disparity is clearly shown in the church in a number of ways. The case studies indicate that, while the SSEC and the ACOM have trained a number of women who qualified in the required course of studies for ordination (like male students), the churches were reluctant and hesitant to ordain them. The trend continues in the SSEC and the ACOM even today. Highly trained women with reputable pastoral skills and character have been pushed aside from the leadership circle of the church to serve in church women's groups, such as the Women's Fellowship, and the Mothers' Union.

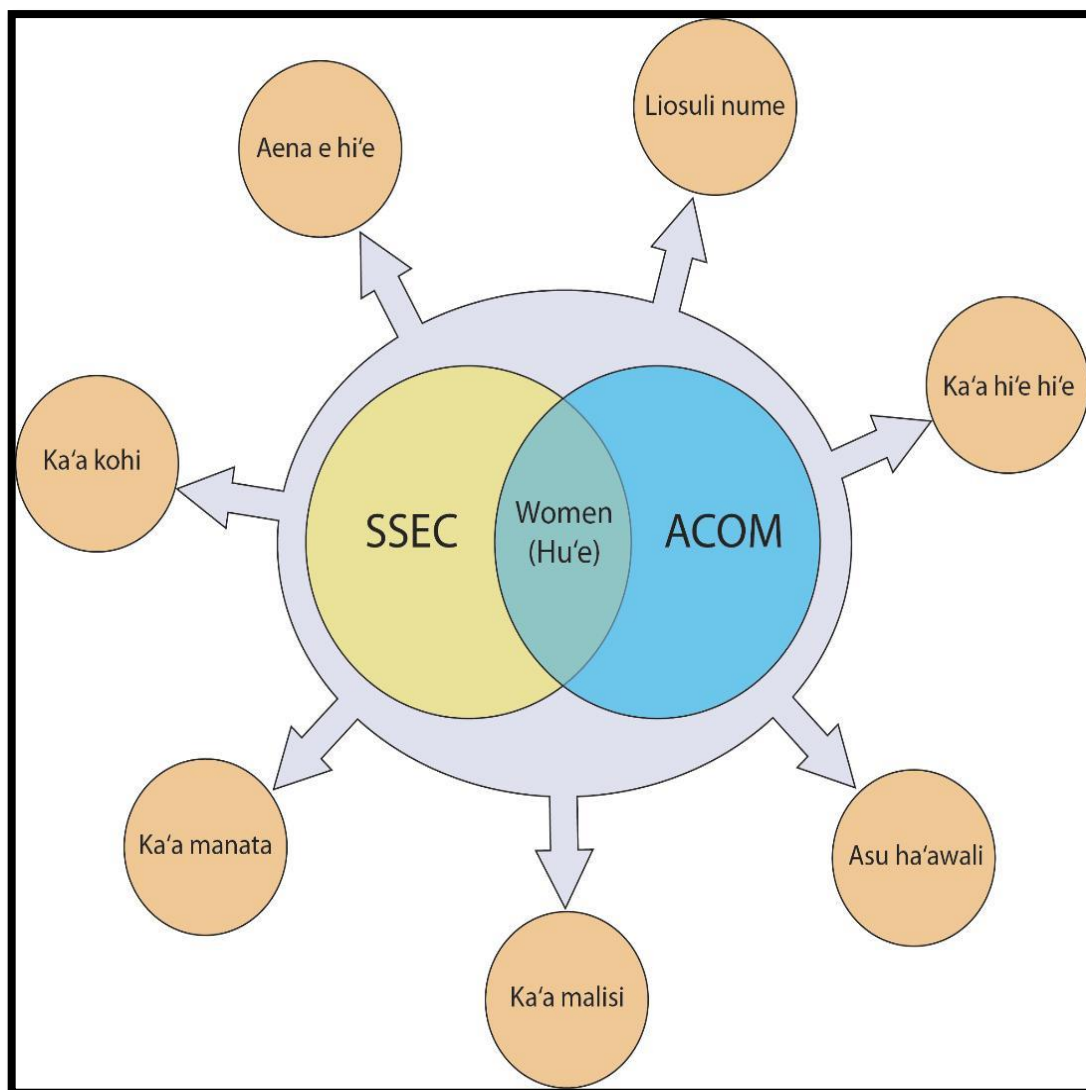


Figure 46: Female Gender Stereotypes

Source: ©Ben Wate, 2017.

Building on indigenous cultural beliefs, and the missionary training objectives of women’s supportive service, the social framework for subordination is facilitated by the churches. While women are being socially encoded as *ka’a malisi* in terms of leadership, alternatively, by cultural and missionary expectations, women are *malisi* to engage in the supportive and welfare service to the church and the home. For instance, in both churches, the roles that women perform are similar in the home and in the community. In the SSEC, the basic role of the deaconess is to manage the domestic affairs of the local church. She does the general cleaning of the church and ensures the building is in good order. She prepares the altar by making floral arrangements and ensures the linen is washed and cleaned for the next service. Not only that, but she is tasked to keep the surroundings of the

church building clean. Similarly, in the ACOM women are enlisted on a daily roster to keep the church interior clean and tidy and to replace the altar cloths and linen when needed. Part of their work is to keep the church surroundings clean for church services. Visiting a local church building today, one would not miss a written paper notice pinned up on the back wall of the church with the names of the women who would be on duty each day to keep the church clean.

Additionally, it is a common practice in Small Malaita for church women's groups to take full responsibility in extending their roles to looking after church visitors. Women are relied on to take care of visitors in terms of feeding and preparing bedding for them, and to ensure they are well looked after.⁴⁸ In most cases, the women have to feed church visitors from their own gardens, or even use their own savings to buy food from shops to prepare the best meals for them, if the local church does not pay for them. Bedding and other necessary items come from the women's own family homes as the village does not have extra bedding for visitors. These responsibilities demand time and money. Because local women have grown up with special social expectations, they are dedicated to, and worry about ensuring food gardens, money and proper bedding are available to cater for such expectations.

The missionary objective of training women also covers the socio-spiritual embodiment of women as Christian wives. They were trained and shaped to adapt to the Christian values of prayer, care, love and forgiveness, tolerance, obedience, and submission to husbands and the authorities. Women were taught new skills and knowledge suitable to Christian home-making, and therefore encouraged to uphold fundamental religious values. The emphasis emerged prominently in the SSEM when women were encouraged to join the *Fiku ana kini* (now Women's Fellowship), (Pollard, 2006), and it is similarly evident in the case of the Mothers' Union.

Fundamentally, through the church women's groups, obedience and submission to the husbands is facilitated and enforced. Critically in the SSEC, submission to the husband is a significant mark of a faithful and genuine Christian wife. In most cases, sermons at

⁴⁸ See also Debra McDougall's (2003) work with the United Church Women's Fellowship in Ranongga.

weddings in both the SSEC and the ACOM emphasise the wife's submission to the husband (following the Pauline instruction).

In a way, the church women's groups have become social and spiritual conduits through which missionary Christian domesticities, and subordination are re-enacted. For instance, apart from household chores, and gardening, the SSEC women are committed to the *saen-saen* programme, in which pastoral visits to provide material assistance to needy people in the local community are made. Similarly, with the Mothers' Union social support services, bathing of the sick and older people is being done as well. These caring activities signify Christian identity and genuine, pious, womanhood.

In their own ways, the Women's Fellowship and Mothers' Union are further used by the church to extend their Christian domestic responsibilities to cover ministries for children and youth, and to encourage spiritual family life (in the case of the ACOM), and endeavour (of the SSEC).

Through these engagements, the members of the Mothers' Union have become reified as the embodiment of the Lady Mary, the mother of Christ. By imagining themselves as *mere nikana Jisas*, the mother of Jesus, the women are being inspired and drawn to the Christian maternal values of Mary (see Hermkens, 2007). By being drawn to the Christian maternal values of love, embracement and care, the members of the Mothers' Union have identified themselves with the children's ministry, such as Sunday school and youth spiritual development. In Small Malaita, the Mothers' Union members are called *teitee maa'i*, Christian mothers. By being the *teitee maa'i*, the ACOM has always relied on the Mothers' Union to deal with children's ministry and to take care of the domestic requirements of the church (cf. Eriksen, 2005; Barker & Hermkens, 2016).



Figure 47: A member of the Mothers' Union

A member of A'ulupeine Mothers' Union wearing a Mother's Union uniform with the picture of Mary the Mother of Jesus cradling the baby Christ in her arms. **Source:** ©Ben Wate, February 2015.

Similarly, the Women's Fellowship has gone through the strong contemplation of Christian womanhood. SSEC women do affiliate themselves so much more with the Christian identity than their maternal values. Although they do not subscribe to Christian motherhood, *teitee maa'i*, as in the case of the Mothers' Union, which strongly emphasises

maternal values, the SSEC women have built on the notion of the Christian wife which highlights the model of faithful Christian wives, with strong emphasis on the Christian values of obedience, love and forgiveness, and discipline. Beside this, the wife genuinely submits to the husband as the head.

As a result of the introduction of the Christian notion of home to local women, and its expectations, aligned with cultural ideology of a *hu'e* (woman), a hybridised conception of womanhood is being produced. While women live a Christian life, by virtue of the cultural norms of Small Malaita, they must not be a *paranio'oareare*⁴⁹ (sound of wooden drum giving instructions). Women are expected to use their "eyes"⁵⁰ to see what is culturally required of them and to act appropriately without being told or signalled to perform specific roles. A real Small Malaita woman knows what to do without seeking any help or being told what to do by someone. It would be an embarrassment for a husband and relatives to know that a wife or a woman has been acting as a *parani o'o areare*.⁵¹ In a way, it is clear that the Small Malaita SSEC and ACOM church leaders have acted like local traditional leaders to put pressure on church women's groups, mostly the Women's Fellowship and the Mothers' Union, to engage and manage these logistical and domestic responsibilities. Church leaders often look upon these groups for such services because of their cultural experience, and their gendered virtues of *ha'ama'unge* (respect), *tolaisulinge* (obedience) and *manekonga* (humility), drawn from *tolahaiinoni*, the local cultural philosophy of Small Malaita.

While the early Christian missionaries had not objectively considered constraining women through the approach they used to train women it nevertheless affected women's development to attain leadership roles in the church. Their approach and thinking about women was quite consistent with the local cultural and religious beliefs about gender relations. In Small Malaita, women are regarded as *madja'a*, dirty, due to the bodily fluids associated with monthly menstruation cycles. Drawing on their traditional religious beliefs about the bodily condition of women, it is believed that women's feminine bodies are

⁴⁹ *Parani o'o areare* connotes a woman that could only do something when she is told, rather than using her cultural knowledge to act when she sees there is a need to do something.

⁵⁰ 'Eyes' means, the cultural knowledge about women's roles.

⁵¹ This cultural expectation contradicts the Western culture of reminding people of their responsibilities through letters, notices and printed weekly duties such as the posted documents normally seen in local churches today.

profane, and this has the potential to desecralise the sacredness of the church. Given this religious ideology, male elders in both the SSEC and the ACOM are often reluctant to see women at the church sanctuary, officiating during the service or preaching.

Besides that, the church has also been influenced by certain Old Testament religious rules about temple worship and sacrifice. In most cases, the SSEC and ACOM elders, including women, used to draw on Israelite worship rules to justify their resistance against women's leadership in church service. Additionally, such religious ideology may have advanced male supremacy over worship and church leadership, and further rejected the women's roles at the sanctuary. It is believed that men are *malisi* (suitable) in their nature as males, to be present in the holy sanctuary. In all these, the ideological framework of non-female participation at the altar of sacrifice is compatible with the traditional Small Malaita religious ideology, that women are considered as *madja'a* (dirt) and their legs unduly *hi'e* (heavy) to enter the sanctuary (cf. Kessing, 1989; Burt, 1994).

With the male control over the church, women can only perform certain roles in the church, and only if they are authorised. In certain circumstances, where the church women's groups seek to organise a service, they have to consult the male leadership. Only particular SSEC women are allowed to preach for example (only through permission from the male pastor). In the ACOM local members of the Mothers' Union serve at the church sanctuary in a secondary capacity. These practices reinforce men's control over both churches.

Women's participation in Church decision-making is minimal and unequal to that of men. For instance, in the SSEC women's membership in higher governing bodies is relatively rare (below ten). This is because membership in church bodies is largely occupied by men, who hold leadership positions such as bishops, ordained ministers, elders, and pastors. While there is a provision for the co-option of members to certain bodies, which calls for the inclusion of women, the involvement of women in decision-making bodies is quite low. Only six women, mostly heads of the six regional Women's Fellowship ministries, are official members of the church governing bodies, representing women in the church.

Although, the ACOM governance structure is quite different from the SSEC, the trend is similar. The membership of women in church governing bodies is low. Similar to the SSEC, the membership of the top governing bodies of the ACOM such as the General Synod, the

Executive Council and the COB, is predominantly male. This is because the membership is defined by the leadership status of the members of the Synods. For instance, the General Synod has three houses, the three pillars that are constitutionally used for important decision-making. These pillars comprise the house of bishops, which includes all of the diocesan bishops (currently nine bishops who are all men), the house of clergy, which consists of all male priests, and the house of laity, comprised of the lay people, including men and women who are not ordained. In many cases, only a few women, who are elected to represent their dioceses, form part of the house of laity. In most cases, dioceses do not elect women to represent their respective dioceses, and as a large number of men attend diocesan synods they dominate the election of the diocesan representatives to the General Synod.

The difficulties for women's participation in decision-making is also evident in the local churches and parishes. Their potential for involvement in decision-making in church vestry committees and parish councils is precluded by the belief that women are expected to be at home with the family to provide care for the children and keep it in order. Only women who represent their women's groups can attend meetings. However, in most cases, their attendance is only to represent female groups, to fulfil the membership requirement of the vestry committee and the parish council, not because they are needed for their knowledge, experience or wisdom.

The above discussion shows that women in both churches have experienced similar treatment despite the structural and fundamental differences between the SSEC and the ACOM. The missionary educational objectives for local women were focused on the home, with the objective to complement and support the leadership roles of the husband. Indeed, the objectives of missionary education have further reinforced local social beliefs and expectations about women: that they are not *malisi* for leadership, in this case in the church leadership. Instead, women are favoured for leadership within the domestic and household domain.

While there has not been a major difference in gender relations, socially and culturally, there appears to be some difference in terms of the church beliefs, guidelines and traditional practices that have impacted on the experience of the women in their everyday social life in church and society. These contrasting factors can be highlighted here.

Women's Groups and their Commitments

One of the fundamental guidelines of the SSEC is “saved to serve”. With this evangelical objective, men and women have to strive to be “saved” before they can openly bear witness to their faith and salvation. In this case, although SSEC women are burdened by basic household responsibilities, women are eager to witness their own faith. Apart from learning the new household skills, the *Fiku ana kini* (Women's Fellowship) also strongly emphasises the notion of personal evangelism of life-sharing and open testimony of the word of God. The practical social services, the *saen-saen* programme that the members of the Women's Fellowship are offering to the local community are indeed the practical manifestations of the women's Christian life commitment. As a locally founded women's organisation within the early SSEM, the sociality of the women is focused on enhancing personal life commitment, and ensuring strong community service. The Women's Fellowship is largely focused on evangelical programmes rather than engaging in social and political activities. For the evangelicals, any forms of social stability and progress in society would only come about when people believe in Jesus Christ and are saved. The “saved to serve” SSEC missionary philosophy has shaped the framework of the Women's Fellowship, to focus more on evangelical work with other women, building a strong alliance and network of rural Christian women.

By contrast, the Mothers' Union is a socially based foreign women's organisation. While it also advocates for Christian family life, its emphasis is socially and family-oriented. This woman's organisation has no clear emphasis on strong Christian spirituality and discipline, unlike the case of the SSEC women. The most inspiring and spiritual enhancement that the local Mothers' Union women draws on is the image of Lady Mary, the mother of Jesus, whom the Mothers' Union adore as a model of Christian motherhood. ACOM women are inspired by the maternal love and care of Mary to Jesus as told in the Bible, and therefore seek to imitate and practise her maternal values of love, humility, simplicity and child-caring. This modelling is compatible with the Christian missionary ideals of Christian domesticity. Indeed, the Mothers' Union appear to have adapted to the model, yet its members lack confidence in public speaking, especially when witnessing to their Christian faith.

The freedom or constraints that women find in expressing themselves in church can also be attributed to church historical settings and beliefs. While women's freedom is constrained by certain cultural beliefs and historical practices, SSEC women have relative freedom during the outreach and fellowship. During outreach and fellowship, SSEC women can competently testify and share their personal experiences, using many of the scriptural texts they have learned, and the charismatic ritualistic mode of affirmative language and utterances such as "praise the Lord", "amen", "God bless you", and "*Masta*". These are powerful assertive statements that generate confidence. This experience, in a way, gives SSEC women confidence to be assertive in worship. In most cases, when participating in other women's rallies, they can freely rise up and elevate their hands, and wave them sideways in a praising gesture with loud singing of choruses that are spiritually arousing.

Comparatively, ACOM women are not afforded the same freedom as SSEC women. They are quite reluctant, and in certain circumstances, are not able to stand with confidence to sing, speak or do a public reading of the Bible or even make an announcement in church. Unlike evangelical Christianity where freedom of worship and informality are emphasised in the SSEC, in the ACOM liturgy is highly rigid. The services are formal and are printed in books and structured in a manner that church leaders, such as priests and catechists control the service, with only the hymns to be sung by the congregations, and the utterance of "amen" is said at the end of the prayers led by priest and catechists.

The non-active participation of the congregation, especially the women, reflects the centrality and bureaucracy of the church, where only people with leadership positions take part in the worship. The formal leadership structure of the church is permanent, and the service is structured in a manner in which the formal leadership holders have the designated roles to perform in the services.

The SSEC Women's Fellowship is an open fellowship of SSEC Christian women, contrary to the Mothers' Union, which is a rather closed socialised group. For the Women's Fellowship, there are no prerequisites to joining the group, except that the women must be baptised SSEC Christians, and publicly renounce their old ways of life, as a testimony of one's new commitment for a new pathway of life. In the Mothers' Union, those who wish to join the organisation have to go through a process of learning, and then are formally admitted. In my experience, the process for admission does not require much commitment

and spiritual discipline, as a criterion for entry. Rather, a woman's admission to the group would only require the seeker's strong recitation of the Mothers' Union prayers, and the willingness to join the women's prayer sessions and attend its important gatherings and meetings. In this case, the Mothers' Union women are socially connected not only on spiritual matters, but also through many social interests and concerns (Scheveyns, 2003). In contrast, the SSEC Women's Fellowship emphasises the significance of Christian spirituality and discipline. Apart from the social interests and concerns, SSEC women are connected through spiritual bonds and interests. Other social activities, such as *saen-saen* or some other planned practical activities are added for the purpose of enhancing the practical application of their faith. Such programmes are significant as evidence in the fulfilment of one's Christian faith.

By focusing on Christian life, SSEC women demonstrate serious commitment to Christian values of obedience, faithfulness and forgiveness, embodying commitment and obedience to authority. The SSEC women ensure that their spiritual relationship with Jesus is alive and well, hence they also ensure that their personal commitment and allegiance to the patriarchal authority of the church should always be maintained. This is also extended to their husbands, and other women in the fellowship. Such spiritual bonds and connections have restricted possibilities in challenging the patriarchal authority, and any political network that suppresses the social and economic life of women and children.

Drawing on the Christian beliefs, SSEC women are often discouraged or restricted from overtly confronting the church authority or the government. Although few women are official members of the highest decision-making bodies of the church, the General Conference, women cannot raise their voice against church decisions or authority (Interview, Catherine, 6 September 2015). The patriarchy is regarded as a divine institution, and any forms of disobedience could be seen as violating God's law. The sin of disobedience would have been committed. Consequently, SSEC women do not openly criticise the church authority or rebuke the government. Usually, they interpret the anti-social occurrences in the church or government as the work of evil and a temptation for sin. Such theological ideology makes it very difficult for women to complain about their uneven social standing in the church or try and change it.

Obviously, this ideological framework, appears to be strong among women in Small Malaita. Faith and confidence in church pastors as *mwane ko esu nana Masta* (a man working for the Master) as male leaders chosen by God, has surpassed any possibilities of questioning their leaders' styles. This belief has led to another series of consequences which have suppressed women. Since the local pastors are perceived as God's chosen and ordained people, any advice or directives given to women by them will always be accepted. This advice is normally interpreted as God's message. Following such evangelical tradition, the local SSEC women have ways of interpreting the roles they perform (although constraining) in the light of 'suffering' for the *Kospel*⁵² (Gospel). Thus, any challenge to church leadership would always be seen as an act of disobedience, a clear display of satanic influences and power. It is a popular belief in the church that disobeying of church leaders (God's chosen people) is Satan's work.

By contrast, the Mothers' Union has strongly identified itself with social and economic concern for families and communities. In translating its basic objectives, the Mothers' Union believes that one of their fundamental roles is to advocate for social, economic, and political progress of all families and communities. Hence, it is always alert to becoming involved in activities and programmes that have the prospect of reducing any potential challenge or harmful effects on families. There is a strong conviction among the Mothers' Union leaders, that in order to be relevant and effective to the vision of the Mothers' Union, its original five objectives must be expanded (Interview, Vunagi, 5 February 2015). This pattern of thinking has been clearly attested to in the expansion of community programmes, such as adult literacy, running of village-based kindergarten schools, doing positive parenting programmes, and counselling victims of crises. To a certain extent, the Mothers' Union leaders also participate in national women's activism programmes, and stage national protests against logging companies (see Scheyvens, 2003). With the same convictions, representatives of the Mothers' Union on church boards and conferences have been active in presenting their views and, at certain times, challenging church authority about specific issues of concern affecting women and families.

⁵² My women research participants from the SSEC have always used the term *Kospel* (Gospel) alternatively with the name God, Jesus, and *Masta*.

Women and Administrative Leadership

In contrast to the SSEC, ACOM women are more empowered administratively at the national level. As noted in the case studies, while it ignores and obstructs the potential of women's participation in the formal pastoral leadership of the church, the ACOM has no concerns in recognising women's leadership potential at top administrative levels. Currently, certain qualified women serve at the church provincial headquarters and participate in top-level management and decision-making. For instance, in the finance department, two women have been appointed to the senior positions: one works as a management accountant, while the other is Finance and Administration Manager (FAM). These positions are normally advertised, and those who are to be appointed have to apply, enclosing required certification of educational qualifications, and then undergo interviews following shortlisting. In many cases the successful candidates are selected based on academic, professional qualifications and experience. The same treatment applies in ACOM schools. At St Nicholas' College in the city of Honiara, a woman has been appointed as the College principal with a female colleague as her deputy. Also at Charles Elliot Fox Community High School on Small Malaita, and Pamua Community College, on Makira, two women have been appointed as their deputy principals. These appointments resemble the ACOM's responses to the global challenge of gender equality in employment and leadership. In a way, the church is compelled to respond positively to women when it comes to secular leadership, while on the other hand, it continues to firmly reject women from taking on pastoral leadership roles within the formal ecclesiastical hierarchy of the ACOM.

In a way, SSEC women's participation in leadership is not so prominent in the administrative arena of the church. For example, during my visit to the church's national head office, I could see a small number of women who work at the head office, and they are only assigned to traditional gendered administrative roles such as typist, receptionist, bookshop sales assistant and account's clerk. Men assume top administrative leadership positions in the church, such as the position of the general secretary, treasurer and the education secretary. Instead, women take informal leadership roles at the lower level. While women are yet to formally be recognised as church pastors, SSEC women are very assertive and active with confidence to perform any pastoral duties assigned to them, or when left unattended by a male leader.

Women and Local Cultural Activities

Another major difference between the SSEC and the ACOM is the participation of women in local cultural activities. While ACOM women are involved in a lot of cultural activities, by church tradition SSEC women are restricted from participating in these activities and rituals. ACOM women are free to be fully involved, given the influence of the early missionaries who encouraged their followers to participate in local cultural rituals (so long as they were not incompatible with Christianity). The SSEC has taught against participation in cultural ritual practices, such as *holikeninge* (bride price ceremony), *gnolitaa* (food prepared during funeral) *mao ni keni* (women's *kastom* dance) and *amusi* (betel nut chewing). These restrictions cover all forms of cultural feasts and harvest rituals which traditionally women have control over. These include the *ngauhe ni keni* (women's feast). Normally, a *ngauhe ni keni* (of *sau*, tuna fish) is held at the end of the *mangadja* (bonito fishing season) to honour and acknowledge the laborious work of the women who bake and take good care of the bonito (tuna) during the season. This ritual is also used to acknowledge the women for their task of feeding their husbands during the *mangadja*. Other rituals that women have influence over include the season of the *tahani lana aaui* (the annual harvest of *canarium indicum* nuts) and the *hikio'olanga* (the first harvest of yam).

Traditionally, women are said to be more intelligent than men in planning and preparing for feasts and other rituals. This is because women know the details of the rituals and how feasts are organised (cf. Kessing, 1989; Pollard, 2006). Women also influence village economic life, which includes food and other agricultural activities. Through involvement in these cultural rituals women can reassert their leadership and control. However, the restriction of SSEC women from participating in the cultural rituals and practices of the local customs weakens their ability to reassert their confidence and leadership. Women are no longer consulted for advice on cultural matters.



Figure 48: Women’s dance at the Small Malaita Yam Cultural Festival, 2018

Normally only women from the ACOM and the RCC participate in cultural rituals such as *kastom* dance. SSEC women are prohibited by the church to participate in such rituals. **Source:** *Small Malaita Constituency Committee. Used with permission.*

In contrast, ACOM women are more assertive when it comes to cultural practices. Elderly women are consulted on the ritual aspects of feasting and folklore, and often direct the young chiefs on cultural matters if they are in doubt about certain rituals. They are also active in coaching young women about their traditional dances and helping to organise feasts with the men. It is a common practice to consult the bride’s mother on what she thinks for the *mwa’ini’ola* (bride price) and the *ha’amwa’asusu*⁵³ (mother’s shell money). Although in some instances, women are not being consulted, the practice of consulting the mother of the bride is increasingly being realised. Comparatively, ACOM women are active

⁵³ *Ha’amwa’asusu* literally means to dry out the mother’s breast. Culturally it refers to a token, usually shell money that is given to a mother by the prospective husband to acknowledge her laborious work in breast feeding the bride (his wife to be) when she was a baby. Traditionally, that ritual is meant for the youngest daughter of the family. However, in some villages on Small Malaita, *ha’amwa’asusu* is extended to all the daughters who are marrying.

when it comes to cultural matters. It shows that women are acknowledged as having specific powers and controls within indigenous society,

While there is a pattern of unequal participation of women in decision-making in the SSEC and the ACOM, there is also a further disparity: ACOM women have more privileges than SSEC women through serving at the senior management and leadership level in the church administration. The research has shown that more ACOM women participate in decision-making at the top level of its governing bodies such as the General Synod, boards, committees and commissions. The ACOM has provided for different pathways for women to be part of the various decision-making bodies of the church. The increasing participation of women in decision-making at the top level occurs due to the church's response to external pressures of international organisations and principles such as human rights, which advocate for gender equality (ACOM General Synod minutes, 2005). Further, internal pressure both within the church and the government ministry responsible for women and family affairs, and NGOs, encourage the church to allow women to participate in decision-making. As discussed in the study, the ACOM has regulated for the direct membership of women in certain church bodies and committees, while provisions were made for women to become members of the General Synod and certain boards to represent the women's organisations such as the Mothers' Union. Due to its structure, the Mothers' Union has nine women representatives who represent their dioceses as Diocesan Mothers' Union presidents. Additionally, the Provincial Mothers' Union president is also a member of the General Synod. That has raised the number of women participating in General Synod proceedings. The SSEC has only six women representing the church's six regions as members of the General Secretary, although the SSEC is the second highest-populated church in Solomon Islands. There is no provision for the Women's National Coordinator to participate as the General Secretary, apart from presenting the national report on church women to the conference (Interview, C. Keni, 5 September 2015). The SSEC has not clearly regulated other pathways that could encourage women to participate in the formal decision-making bodies of the church.

The SSEC top-level authority seems to be silent about leadership and is in a dilemma over allowing women to take on higher leadership roles in the church as pastors, ministers, and reverend bishops. It has not been formally discussed. However, in Small Malaita, there is a mixed response to this. While four out of five church pastors I have interviewed supported

equitable gender roles within the church leadership, one of the senior pastors has rebutted equality of men and women in church leadership and draws on traditional gendered roles. The church authority has been very silent on the question of allowing women to be ordained. This may be the result of the influence of indigenous Malaitan religious beliefs about the profanity of women, as most of the church senior leaders and elders are originally from Malaita.

In contrast, the ACOM senior leadership appear to support the move to close the gap in gender relations between men and women in the performance of church pastoral responsibilities. In an interview with the ACOM Archbishop, and two other Senior Bishops, there is a general view that women must be supported and given opportunity to assume roles that are normally given to the men (Interviews, D. Vunagi, 13 February 2015; N. Tome, 14 February 2015; S. Sahu, 24 February 2015). For instance, the Archbishop spoke of his attempts to amend the church constitution to be gender-inclusive as it only provides for males to assume formal pastoral leadership roles in the church. However, the Senior Bishop Nathan Tome argues that the decision made by the General Synod invalidates the inclusion of women, and is not a decision that fairly represents the view of the church and the different dioceses, but serves to fulfil constitutional provisions. While the Bishop of Malaita argues that custom is important and has its own value in Christian communities, when matters of conflict between custom and church arise, the Gospel of Jesus Christ is supreme and must be followed. Therefore, while the top leadership in the ACOM supports gender equality in church pastoral leadership, local leadership in dioceses and parishes is reluctant and unsupportive of gender equality in leadership, particularly the ordination of women.

The difference in gender relations especially among the two church women's groups appears to be the direct result of the church's fundamental beliefs and traditional practices. The SSEC grounds its faith on the Bible and emphasises Christian spirituality, while at the same time rejecting traditional cultures and human ideas that are not compatible with the Bible. Following this, the Women's Fellowship avoids alliances with other national feminist activist movements and NGO women's groups but seeks to reassert itself based on its belief in the Bible and the fundamental teachings of the SSEC.

While the ACOM encourages more Christian teaching in general, it is particularly strongly associated with the social dimension of the teaching Gospel. The belief that social action is a significant mark of Christianity has been part of the historical and fundamental principles of the ACOM. Following the same principle, the Mothers' Union overtly presents itself as an agency for social, economic, and political action to deal with crises that affect the local church communities.

Paradoxical Experience and Gender relations

The SSEC and the ACOM are caught in a paradox concerning their approach to gender relations in the church. In the two case studies, I have discussed a number of the factors that contribute to prevailing gender inequality in the church, and most significantly the constraining experience that the local church women are currently experiencing. But significantly, against this context both churches, as Christian institutions are bound by their highest obligation to honour the Bible, and its teaching, and the fundamental principles contained in constitutions that safeguard their faith and practices. This dilemma results from the complex situation of reconciling local cultural beliefs and practices, missionary traditions and church constitutions against Biblical imperatives.

Indeed, both churches differ in their approaches to considering the roles of women in the church. As noted earlier in the case studies, by tradition the SSEC has been reluctant and refuses to make allowances for local culture. The church authorities ban and discourage members from participating in local cultural activities and rituals. In doing this, the church has implemented the missionary guideline to make belonging to the SSEC a clean break from cultural practices. However, while church rules remain strong, in practice the SSEC in Small Malaita has failed to live by the church rules. As discussed in the case studies, the local cultural ideologies about the gender roles and the restrictions of women have influenced the church practices. A typical example of this can be found in the case of the Riverside chief and church pastor Edwin, who refused the plan for women to be ordained as a pastor in his home village, and in Small Malaita generally. In doing so, he adhered to the traditional custom of male leadership in the church. Besides that, it is evident that the church members generally participate in the local traditional cultural practices such as *holikeninge* (bride price ceremony) and even *maetaa* (mortuary feast), although the ceremonies are modified and given new names.



Figure 49: Public notice at Herani e'si SSEC village, Small Malaita

It is against local *kastom* for women to wear open clothes (*lava lava*) and trousers which are considered disrespectful to chiefs (see rule 3). **Source:** ©Ben Wate, July 2015.

While the church appeals for a clean break from traditional practices, in reality the SSEC on Small Malaita is very selective about that. Its members continue to maintain certain cultural practices, and make custom rules about how a woman should behave, and what roles women can do in the church. The practice continues in the church even today. More significantly, cultural beliefs about the profanity and incompetency of women exist in different tiers of the church in Small Malaita, eventually resulting in the current church treatment of women.

In comparison to the SSEC, the ACOM accommodates the local culture. Following the Melanesian Missionary philosophies, the ACOM seek to encourage the cultural practices and has moved to integrate certain cultural aspects in its worship. Given the

accommodation of cultural practices, there is evidence that the church has been controlled by the traditional beliefs about the status of women, and their social and religious condition. However, while there has been a strong missionary belief in the church that traditional cultures are given by God for the orderliness of human society, the influence of the local cultural ideology has suppressed the fundamental Christian belief as contained in the Bible and the constitutional statement that holds men and women as co-equals (see *ACOM Manual*, 2014). In this context, the church is caught in a paradox whereby it compromises and fails to submit to the fundamental teaching of the church and the Biblical imperatives (such as the Pauline theology of equality of men and women). These beliefs have generated a number of social expectations that designate the home as the ideal institution for women to exercise their leadership and control. Meanwhile, the church argues that public leadership is the rightful domain of men.

One of the critical dilemmas that challenge the two churches is their allegiance to the Bible and the manner in which the churches interpret and understand the biblical text that speaks about the roles and status of women. The SSEC's literal approach to the Bible poses a critical dilemma in dealing with the question of women's roles in the church, and the extent to which women are considered for formal church leadership. It has always been the case, by virtue of its evangelical tradition, that the SSEC has seen the Bible as the absolute word of God that provides the ultimate truth and answers for questions of faith and church practices in all human situations of life. The SSEC relies on biblical texts to justify its allegiance to the Bible, such as:

All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work (2 Timothy 3:16-17 NRSV).

In the New International Version (NIV), Scripture is said to be the "breath of God," and its role is to guide all who believe in God, by way of correcting people and encouraging them to act as righteous people of God. A critical point of interest is the notion of acting in a righteousness manner according to God's ways.

By taking a fundamentalist approach to the Bible, the SSEC has encountered the challenges of complexity and dilemma when dealing with the roles and status of women in the church. This is because the Bible is not consistent when speaking about the roles and status of

women in the Christian community. It has discrepancies that cannot be understood and reconciled in a local context. Yet, the SSEC has celebrated life and freedom, claiming to be under the direction of the Holy Spirit. It is believed that the Holy Spirit is tasked to remove the cultural and human barriers that barricaded the freedom in the church. As shown in the study of the SSEC on Small Malaita, the much-anticipated freedom has not been seen or experienced in the church. The SSEC has not been able to reconcile the prominent biblical texts that have caused dilemmas in the church over the roles and status of women with regard to men. For instance, on the positive side, the Pauline theology has articulated the notion of equality and one-ness of baptised Christians, regardless of gender, ethnic or racial background as specified in Galatians 3:28. The text captures the essence of inclusiveness and equality of Christians in church, as clearly articulated in the SSEC constitution.

However, a complex situation seems to appear when, on the other hand, in a contrasting Pauline instruction on Christian domestic responsibilities and accountability between wives and husbands, wives must submit to their husbands in every way (Ephesians 5:22-23; Colossians 3:18). The Pauline instructions for wives and husbands seem to be compatible with local cultural expectations of women, especially wives on Small Malaita. Again, the SSEC has approved of the instruction and theologically interprets it as the divine order of things.⁵⁴ It appears that it is from the church's interpretation that SSEC women do not overtly challenge church authority. In Small Malaita, one could hardly see an open confrontation of a husband by his wife, or a church pastor being confronted. Women hold on to the interpretation and belief that a wife's submission to the husband is a divinely ordained rule. The interpretation, in a way, influenced the manner in which the church theorises the roles and status of women in the church.

The SSEC has been caught in a paradox when it comes to Christian obedience and loyalty to the Biblical discrepancies concerning the equality between men and women, and their prospective roles and status in the church. The dilemma of living with the Biblical discrepancies has made the local women become even more confused as to whether the church is obedient to God and lives up to the Christian truth (Interview, Betty, 21 July

⁵⁴ Such interpretation can be seen in the Amplified Bible which SSEC pastors and elders usually carry with them in church, and prepare sermons and reflections from. This Pauline instruction appears to have been strongly affirmed in the SSEC both by men and women.

2015). This dilemma may have been one of the factors that prevents women's progress towards leadership.

As far as the ACOM is concerned, the Bible is authoritative and remains the determining factor for all matters of faith, and also has the final word on any conflicts concerning the church teaching and practices. However, the Bible has not been followed because there is a general belief that, although the Bible is said to be word of God, in essence it is subject to error, since it was written by human hands. Hence, the interpretative approach to the Bible is far less literal and more open to interpretation. With this approach the interpretation of the Bible follows a certain historical, critical methodology. Additionally, the church uses the triadic principles of Scripture, tradition and reason in dealing with its interpretations. Such an approach could have the potential of being biased because of the critical nature of the methodological approach, but, it could also have the potential of opening up another lens in ensuring a balanced and reasonable conclusion is reached.

Comparatively, the approaches of the two churches towards the Bible have reflected the academic status of the pioneers and the tradition of Christianity that each church represents. The SSEC emerged from the basic evangelical mission work for the South Sea islanders in the Queensland sugarcane plantations in Australia in the 1880s. The teaching and understanding of the Bible is basic and simple in a manner that illiterate islanders could understand and ruminate on. In a way, the meanings and interpretation of the biblical texts were pre-defined and interpreted by the pioneer expatriate missionaries who passed on the meanings of the biblical texts through the education syllabus taught in SSEM schools. There is evidence that certain interpretations of the Biblical texts and their meaning have reflected the missionary ideology of the time: the strict submission of wives to their husbands, and the general obedience of women to church authority. Such an approach has caused an extensive dilemma when dealing with the question of equality of men and women.

For the ACOM, there is a general openness to the understanding of the Bible and its teaching. While the ACOM believes in the Bible and its teaching, it encourages the use of reason to define certain meanings of the Biblical texts that demand the wife's submission to the husband, and the Pauline instruction of valuing the equality of baptised congregations which make men and women equal. By tradition, its openness and the encouragement of

independent interpretation allows the ACOM to be more open to the leadership potential of women in the church, despite being challenged by the constitutional requirements. To a certain extent, as discussed in the case studies, the church's encouragement of intellectual reasoning paved the way for women to be allowed to serve as an employee at the senior management level within the church administration, and also, to be appointed as school principals.

It is evident that the factors contributing to the inequality of men and women in the SSEC could be due to a number of reasons. These include the local cultural dynamics and influences which have resulted in the church not honouring the rule of making a clean break from local traditions and culture. Further to that, in most cases, the preservation of the historical ideology that the local *alahanga* is superior to the church authority has influenced the women's roles in the church, as custom chiefs and elders have always claimed the historical continuity of the traditional chiefly authority, *alahanga*. Thirdly, it is clear that while the SSEC has committed itself to recognising the Bible as the absolute word of God, it denies the equality of women with the men, but subordinates women to men, denying the fundamental Christian truth.

Both churches are governed by constitutions. While it is important for the church beliefs, mission undertakings and practices to be guided by the constitution to avoid chaos, there is evidence that the church's constitution can also be abused to discriminate against women leaders. For the ACOM, this has been the case.

The SSEC approach to the church constitution is fundamentally different from the ACOM. While the church is guided by the constitution, it does not entirely depend on the constitution to dictate the spiritual affairs and ministry of the church. This can be seen in the manner in which the church regulates decisions concerning the participation of women in the church as pastors and elders. While the constitution may not be clear, the need for female leadership is usually conceptualised and understood on the basis of calling from *Masta*, and not on the constitution. This can be seen in the case study of two local women being elevated to the position of pastors in their local villages. This has contrasted with the ACOM approach, which relies on the authority and the direction of its constitution. In some ways, the constitution has always been used by an anti-women group within the church to

object to the participation of women in formal leadership, or to undertake certain important roles in the church.

The church's constitution is an obstacle to the equality of women in the ACOM. Following Anglican practice, the ACOM is guided by the constitution. It stipulates the functions of the ministries of the church, and sets the requirements of the appointees for formal leadership positions. In its present form, it is clear that the constitution does not have provision for women to be appointed to hold leadership positions in the church such as deacon, priest and bishop. Senior administrative positions such as the position of general secretary, chancellor, and mission secretary are exclusively male. One of the many difficulties is the traditional power of veto which each diocese is vested with. Dioceses which are reluctant to accept a new bill to review certain sections in the constitution will always use their exclusive power of veto to negate the bill. In this case, since the late 1990s, attempts have been made to allow for gender-inclusiveness in the constitution regarding the holders of the three-fold ministries, and the senior executives' leadership positions. Furthermore, the bill to allow women to be ordained as priests in the ACOM has been voted against. In many cases, the constitution has created a complex situation for the recognition of women's leadership roles in the formal leadership hierarchy of the church. Although some dioceses have adopted a matrilineal descent whereby women have their cultural leadership legitimated, the church constitution does not cater for matrilineal culture for women's leadership, so women are nevertheless still unable to participate in church leadership.

Indeed, the ACOM constitution has rendered a complex scenario for gender relations in the ACOM when it problematised the biblical and theological imperative of the equality of men and women as children of God. In essence, the present constitution is a relic of the early English missionaries, which exclusively accounted for the male control of church leadership. It was drafted in New Zealand in the 1970s and was given to the ACOM when it received its independence in 1975. Although, the church has begun to legislate for the inclusion of more women to participate in the church's decision-making the representation of women in general has no effective ability to transform the entire gender relations in the ACOM. This is because, women are not ordained and cannot participate in the decision-making and formal leadership representation as a priest or as a bishop. Their representation

reflects their gender, deriving mostly from the Mothers' Union, and the women's religious orders.

The women's endeavour for leadership and recognition is constrained by the constitution. An example of this is the case mentioned in Chapter One, the ordination of local female priest from Ysabel, the Reverend Veronica Vasethe, to priesthood by the Church of England in 2011, and the controversy surrounding that. While her ordination was recognised, it was argued that her priesthood is invalid under the ACOM constitution since there is no provision for the feminine gender in the three-fold ministry of the church. Thus, she was only issued with a "hospitality offer" of permission to officiate in formal priestly ministry to the CSC, in which she is a member, and currently its superior. Her priestly ministry is confined to her religious community but not available to the wider ACOM community. This is a typical approach and application of the constitution to the local female priest. However, the ACOM's application of the constitution and authority against the local female priest does not apply to expatriate female priests visiting the ACOM. In some instances, they are at liberty to wear the priestly garments, preach and assist with the distribution of Holy Communion (R. Smellie, personal communication, 12 March 2017; see also, the 9th General Synod *Minutes*, 1999: 7-15).⁵⁵ Granting privileges to expatriate females that are not granted to local women in the ACOM is common in Melanesia (cf. Jolly, 1989).

Local Church Women: Negotiating the Patriarchy for Empowerment

Despite the social inequality that local church women in the SSEC and the ACOM experience, they have not been silent but have continuously sought to empower themselves using their collective identities and values as agencies for empowerment. In their own ways SSEC and ACOM women negotiate their own empowerment in a manner that considers the immediate socio-political, cultural and church context in which they live (see Kandiyoti 1988; Scheyvens, 2003). Furthermore, it is shaped by the Christian values and teaching the women have identified with. The local women constantly present themselves as not *keni mola mwakule* (ordinary women) but *hu'e tolahaini inoni ana* (a *kastom* woman), and a *hu'e kaleni soiha'adainge* (a Christian woman). They differentiate themselves from other

⁵⁵ In my conversation with Robert Smellie, a retired chancellor (1975-2002) (chief legal advisor) of ACOM, he spoke of an event where an expatriate female priest from New Zealand, who went for a particular work assignment in Solomon Islands, was permitted to perform her priestly ministry in the ACOM while she worked there. A number of other expatriate women did the same.

women. These social platforms provide an agency to negotiate a contextual empowerment structure that is relevant to the context of the Christian women on Small Malaita. Although the context is unique for Small Malaita, similar appeals to cultural metaphors to assert power and agency is prevalent in Melanesia.

In Small Malaita, a wife there is referred to as *dunge* (fire) that lightens the dark house, and gives warmth to a cold house, and sends out smoke from the thatch-roofed kitchen to signify life. Appealing to such cultural metaphors in a patriarchal society is a powerful strategy for women to reassert their power to be recognised. It is a cultural way of mitigating and bargaining with the patriarchal (Kandiyoti, 2008) power structure, “removing blocks to power” (Itzhaky & York, 2000: 225, quoting Solomon’s work, 1976).

Framing women’s empowerment in the context of church women’s groups in Solomon Islands, particularly in Small Malaita within the liberal and development conceptualisation of empowerment, is thus highly contentious. Dodd & Gutierrez (1990) argue that the term empowerment is an ambiguous term which is discursively used in different contexts. Misra (2006: 871) writes, “empowerment is myriad-nuanced. It suggests more than it tells”. Due to its ambiguity, it is indispensable not to universalise a standard meaning and approach to all social contexts and hold them accountable to the liberal definition of empowerment, although there is a common objective in addressing the powerlessness of women (Kandiyoti, 1988; Gerami, & Lehnerer, 2001). For liberal feminists the power and rights of individuals foreground empowerment theory and the mechanism to acquire it is through a legal and constitutional approach (Rowland-Serdar & Schwartz-Shea, 1991).

Initially, empowerment draws on the notion of ‘power’. It refers to the ‘power’ one requires for taking control over one’s own life (Misra, 2006). This could be social, economic, political, psychological or religious power. However, in development studies concerning women in third-world countries, the theories of women’s empowerment are dominated by the Western liberal notion of economic and political development, which is idealised by gender equality as a platform to allow women to share equal power with men in the socio-economic and political sphere in a given society (see Macintyre, 2017). In essence, such a liberal theory of women’s empowerment has lent itself exclusively to the view that women’s empowerment in third-world countries must embrace a structural and holistic empowerment that would transform the whole spectrum of their livelihood, including the

socio-economic, political, cultural and the religious environment, if women are to be empowered. It is a kind of empowerment that transcends the domestic arena and moves into the public sphere and subscribes to the view that certain “rights” should be accorded to women (Rowland-Serdar & Schwartz-Shea, 1991).

In a way, the liberal advocacy of women’s empowerment is done within the legal and constitutional rights framework, so that women can be equally treated on the same social scale similar to the male, to acquire social, economic and political advantages and privileges (Rowland-Serdar & Schwartz-Shea, 1991). However, for the development theorists, there is also a general assumption that women cannot be empowered without economic empowerment, because this relates to women’s development that allows women to take charge of their own lives (Forbes, 1990). The power to gain control over the political forces in a given cultural environment encourages women to improve their lives and their social standing in society (Haq, 2001). Such a liberal ideology has a widespread influence in Solomon Islands, mostly among the educated women who work as public servants in government offices, and in the private sector. Despite bringing some advantages, in effect, the liberal theory of development creates a schism with local women in the village and threatens local cultural authority. Indeed, the liberal and development theories of women’s empowerment appear to be relevant in a liberal society, but are quite challenging, or even in some cases irrelevant to the local cultural context of Small Malaita. In a local society where the men or husbands and community are central to the livelihoods of women, a contextual family empowerment is relevant and necessary.

Based on the historical development of the feminist movement in the 1970s and 1980s, Rowland-Serdar and Schwartz-Shea (1991) have warned that “gaining access to equal legal and constitutional rights, and gaining access to admission to previously male-dominated arenas is not the equivalent of empowerment for women” (1991:606). The burden of women crossing from the domestic to the public life arenas rendered women a “double day” burden as it appears that women merely exchange one burden for another (1991:606). This has recast the ambiguous notion of the liberal ideal of women’s empowerment. This could be said to be the case with economic and political empowerment which also lies within the liberal feminist arena. This scenario reproduced the ambivalence of women and confusion about the value of equal opportunity, making them doubt their own power in either domestic or public spheres (1991:606).

Alternatively, while feminism advocates for political equality, legal rights and individual liberty, it fails to locate and secure the “self” and the context in which women are advocating. Rowland-Serdar & Schwartz-Shea, (1991:606) have stated, “people whose sense of self is secure are capable of becoming empowered through choice and the realisation of rights”, an approach that is opposite to the liberal feminist who also tended to assume ready-made selves for whom the language of rights is second nature. Thus, there is a call to begin with a better understanding of the self and the context in which women live their lives (Rowland-Serdar & Schwartz-Shea, 1991). Rowland-Serdar and Schwartz-Shea are quite right. There is a need for context, and departure points to consider women’s empowerment in the case of Small Malaita church women’s groups.

In an interesting analysis of gender and empowerment, Yoder and Kahn (1992) give an explanation of how power is perceived and utilised in terms of gender. Women seek “power to” with an objective of personal empowerment, while on the contrary, men seek “power over” for domination and control (see Itzhaky & York, 2000: 225-226). However, many contemporary women’s groups and organisations have frequently sidestepped “power to” at the political level and have engaged on “power over” preferring inward looking to “power on” (Dixon, 1993; also see, Itzhaky & York, 2000: 227). In a way, the trend of increasing conceptualisation of empowerment as a way of “power over” contravenes the local traditional feminine concerns for cooperation and communion (Riger, 1993; Itzhaky & York, 2000:227), a case that is relevant to the context of women in Small Malaita. This has reflected the different approaches to empowerment. Liberal empowerment is highly individualistic, and has concerns for legal rights and power to assert control and domination over social, political and economic affairs. In contrast, empowerment for the traditional female emphasises the “power to” participate collaboratively as a group to make decisions over local projects of concerns for community and family. It is an empowerment that recognises the importance of local men and leaders as significant stakeholders in community life. Hence, the sub-Saharan’s theoretical framework of women’s empowerment theorised by Kandiyoti (1988) of “bargaining patriarchy” is an appropriate and suitable approach for local church women on Small Malaita. As shown in the case studies, Small Malaita was founded on the cultural philosophy of *tolahani inoni (kastom)* and functions through the mechanism of *djadjawau-djadjamai* (give and take). Although there is general discrimination in the roles that women perform in society, in general the local authority recognises the value of women and important roles they play in the local

society, hence, during *mangadja*⁵⁶ (bonito fishing season) in some communities, especially in Sa'a, *gnauhe ni keni* (women's feast) is held in their honour, to mark out and reciprocate the important roles, they play in the local community. There is a possibility, a cultural conduit, available for the local women to further reassert themselves, and appeal for recognition.

The case of the rural church women's groups in Solomon Islands is critical to the different emphases of meaning and application of empowerment. The different perspective of empowerment has been seen in Scheyvens' (2003) study. Over the years, geographers and development theorists used the framework of "empowerment and welfare" to analyse church women's groups in Solomon Islands to find out whether they could be a potential agency for an empowerment project, given their daily engagement in local church welfare activities such as cooking, sewing, family hygiene and childcare (Douglas, 2003). However, in research conducted on Malaita, Guadalcanal, and in the Western provinces by Scheyvens (2003), she reported that, as far as the local church women's groups are concerned, it is difficult to differentiate between welfare and empowerment projects since both have been interwoven in the daily engagement of the local church women's groups' social and personal family lives.

Scheyvens' (2003) conclusion holds much truth for Small Malaita. Although the social life in which women live lacks modern convenient facilities such as running water, electricity, permanent buildings and self-contained facilities, these physical conditions should not be taken on face value to define the local women as underprivileged or powerless (see Douglas, 2003). Despite the fact that most women lack modern infrastructure and social services, and live in a male-controlled society, women have influence over the village-based economy. They plant their own food gardens and manage resulting harvests for family consumption. In the event of feasting, it is the women that must be consulted about the right season to harvest, and whether there is enough food to hold a *kastom* feast. In effect local village women in Melanesia have control over subsistence agriculture that in most cases lead them to assert power over the domestic economy. I discussed with her how local women in Small Malaita cultivate and manage the harvesting season of yams and taros, which are valued as important root crops in the local cultural food hierarchy.

⁵⁶ Traditionally, the *Mangadja* season begins in November and finishes at the end of February. This is a season where bonito (tuna) is fished using the local canoes and bamboo rods with locally made string and hooks.

Whenever a feast is planned, women must be consulted for their advice whether it is possible to hold the feast based, on their knowledge of the season and quality of the crop harvest.⁵⁷

In Small Malaita, certain elderly women hold important ancestral genealogies, possess important knowledge about local land ownership and also about certain harvest rituals. These significant aspects of village life have made the local women powerful. However, such power is embraced not for personal advantage, but to collaborate and operate within the community context.

Women's power in this context is not to have "power over" in the liberal sense, but "power to" sustain the social life of the community. In circumstances of manipulation by the local and church authorities, women could assert their power through the recognised maternal values, or, in the case of the church, Christian values. Building on the work of Batliwala (1993), Paterson (2008) pointed out that empowerment "is not a mere change of mind-set, but a visible demonstration of that change which the world around is forced to acknowledge..." (2008: 336). Indeed, the teaching and spiritual inspiration they obtain from the women's group has transformed their minds, and empowers them with confidence to manage family crises, and also step out into the public space to participate in the broader social and economic issues that may have a harmful effect on the community.

As discussed in the two case studies, despite historical factors that constrain unequal participation of women in the church, the SSEC Women's Fellowship and the ACOM Mothers' Union have their own agencies for empowerment.

Cultural and Maternal Values

In essence, while both women's groups are indigenous to Small Malaita by tradition and culture, their social platforms for empowerment vary. The ACOM Mothers' Union has used the cultural and Christian maternal values to reassert women's participation in the local church community, while SSEC women have not used this agency, but alternatively, have sought to use the agency of Christian womanhood. It is important to note the cultural usage of feminine relational terms. The term *hu'e* refers to a married woman, and the term *teitee*

⁵⁷ These observations are the result of a personal conversation with Professor Margaret Jolly at the Australian National University Canberra, in February 2015, I would like to acknowledge Professor Jolly's insights for allowing me to develop these ideas.

literally refers to the maternal quality of the woman. It is customary for children to call their mother *teitee* to signify that she has given birth to and nurtured them. Besides that, the woman's nieces and nephews from both maternal and paternal sides would always address their aunty as *teitee*, as there is no local language term for aunty in Small Malaita. Furthermore, relationally and symbolically, the term *teitee* has always been used in Small Malaita as a dignified relational mark of respect recognising the maternal qualities of a woman, whether she has children or not. What are the significant caring and provisional qualities of a woman that culturally qualify her to be addressed as *teitee*?

A Mothers' Union member is referred to as *teite* (mother), while the Mothers' Union, as a group is called *pulitaa ni teitee* (a group of mothers). The founding objective of the Mothers' Union has realigned the organisation with the missionary objective of Christian motherhood which saw the integration of the maternal values of *teitee* (mother) and those of *kaleni soihadjainge* (Christian). While the Mothers' Union is a Christian organisation, the members of the Mothers' Union have always emphasised their maternal values, as *teitee*. As discussed, the cultural notion of *teitee* is embraced with the natural and cultural values that are highly regarded and recognised, not only in Small Malaita but broadly in Solomon Islands (see McDougall, 2003; Pollard, 2003). The Solomon Islands Women for Peace reified this agency when negotiating the peace process and the surrender of firearms and weapons during the ethnic conflict in Solomon Islands in 2001 (Pollard, 2003). As discussed in the case study, the maternal values of *teitee*, and the social translation of these values in various social contexts in Small Malaita, have resulted in the recognition of the local Mothers' Union. Furthermore, the realignment and the integration of the local women in the communities, and the roles they perform in the community in everyday social life in families, tribes and communities, generally give rise to positive approval of their values following the path of unconscious (natural) reciprocal social transaction or what the people of Small Malaita refer to as *djadjawau- djadjamai* (give and take). The notion of exchange has set the agency for negotiating a sacred space. As we can see in the case study, the collective identity of the Mothers' Union has provided an agency whereby the local church authority has inevitably reciprocated the *lololata maa'i* (sacred space), and the social roles once reserved to men, in exchange for the maternal valuable gift of welfare services provided to the local church and the community at large (Barker & Hermkens, 2016; see also, Dickson-Waiko, 2003; Paini, 2003; Pollard, 2003).

Additionally, the mutual imagination and the assimilation of the local notion *teitee* to that of the Biblical model of Mary, has also elevated the local women to possess a homogenised collective identity, not only as Christian mothers, but specifically as *Mere nikana Jisas*⁵⁸ (Mary the Mother of Jesus) (see McDougall, 2003). The local women have expressed the inner feeling of being transformed to live the values of care, peacefulness, humility, equality, forgiveness, and more importantly the experience of obedience. While these are similar Christian values, the Mothers' Union has closely identified itself as *mere nikana Jisas*, not so much as Christian women (see Hermkens, 2007, 4-7).

More profoundly, the social integration of the values of *teitee* within the local cultural spectrum of Small Malaita with the values of *mere nikana Jisas* within the Christian community, have enforced dual-powerful agencies to reassert their recognition from both the local cultural authority and the patriarchal authority of the church.

Contrasted with the Mothers' Union and, the integrated agency of *teitee Mere nikana Jisas*, the SSEC Women's Fellowship has located their agency within the model of Christian womanhood. They have identified themselves *mo keni a Masta* (Master's women). They do not reassert themselves as Christian mothers based on the maternal nature but draw specifically on the notion of Christian women evangelists, tasked to evangelise the Christian message, a role that the SSEM missionaries had encouraged the women to do in the Christian Endeavour ministry, and the vision of the initial *Fiku ana kini*. Their deep Christian spirituality and commitment has led them to experience confidence that enables them to attest to their newly found identity as *mo keni a Masta* to deal with their everyday family and personal crises. SSEC women are very extroverted and competent when dealing with spiritual activities, an assertive manner that has not been available to the ACOM. In many ways, the SSEC Women's fellowship is extroverted in dealing with Christian activities and witness. They have a lot of confidence in public presentations. They can speak in public, either presenting personal testimonies, take up worship or chorus leadership during fellowship services. But most significantly, SSEC women are very self-confident preaching and can easily accept a given opportunity to preach in any church services or at a Women's Fellowship convention. SSEC women theorise the significance of a genuine

⁵⁸ The local members of the Mothers' Union have often been referred as *Mere* (Mary) or *mo Mere* (the Marys)

relationship with the *Masta*, and, through the commitment to Christian womanhood, they are bound to express their faith through the *saen-saen* programme. Local women believe that, in order to be powerful witnesses, the social relationship within the Women's Fellowship and among individual women members must be spiritually of good standing. SSEC women usually begin their fellowship by allowing each of the women who have personal crises with other women to pray and reconcile before an activity can commence. This has not been the case with the ACOM women who have seen their roles as social and familial. Instead, the SSEC women have reified themselves as agents of the *Masta*, in spreading his message to ensure that they are personally purified to be effective agents for the *Masta's* words.

Teitee Maa'i (Christian Motherhood) and Keni Maa'i (Christian Womanhood)

It is evident that the Women's Fellowship and the Mothers' Union have seemingly different forms of agency in re-asserting themselves in negotiating their recognition and power to deal with social, family and personal crises. For example, while SSEC women also engage in providing the *saen-saen*, which is an important means of women's expression of Christian faith to the individual needs of the community, the women appear to have been recognised and reassert themselves through the agency of Christian womanhood. In the process of being recognised, SSEC women played an important role by firmly committing themselves to *asunge a Masta* (Master's work). Being committed to the *Masta* means women ought to remain faithful to prayer, attend women's outreach, be able to share testimony of their personal life journey, be given the opportunity to lead prayers during Women's Fellowship programmes, and be chorus leader during fellowship. Furthermore, the women's lives must be morally sound, and there is a general expectation of the transfer of the *Masta's* life to the domestic home and the local church community. Clearly, for the SSEC, this model of Christian womanhood has given local church women an avenue for action, and the power to deal with local issues, not through human rights and feminist theories of argument but through *walana Masta* (Master's word).

In essence, SSEC women are more confident than ACOM women in their personal faith witness. They are much more eloquent in open re-interpretation of common selected Biblical texts to address issues, and to rebut the social crises that affect the community. Following the tradition of SSEC, the women's interpretation has always viewed the anti-social crisis of domestic violence as caused by Satan, and that the only way to address it is

by stepping up and strengthening the preaching of the *walana Masta* and praying for the men who have committed these anti-social behaviours in their homes so that *Masta* can change their lives. This view is common in the SSEC, as has been demonstrated in this study. Even in the case of a husband that has divorced his wife or insulted her, there is always a tendency that the wife would remain convinced that what her husband did was the consequence of Satan's influence and because of that she must continue to pray for him. Christian conviction has effectively provided the SSEC women with a profound platform, whereby they are confident to remain vigilant with their husband, to pray and even counsel him when he has committed domestic violence. Women alleged that the Christian men do not deprive their wives or abuse them. This implies that any abusive attitude towards the family including the wives reflects the presence of Satan in the family through the husband. The husband is an agent of evil, which means that he is innocent and only a victim, and therefore needs counselling and prayer in order to be rid of the evil spirit. The women's subjective belief is that their husbands are fine, but the devil tricks men into abusing their wives and families. With such a view, SSEC women have not given up and believe that the work they are doing in combatting their husbands' attitudes through prayer and counselling is part of their Christian obligations and more significantly as Christian women.

By contrast, ACOM women have strongly emphasised the social and political aspect of their roles as women. Although the initial orientation and focus of the Mothers' Union is basically Christian, the interpretation of its objectives has shifted and its focus is more on social and political activities (see Scheyvens, 2003). The shift has allowed women to engage in social activities such as teaching positive parenting and literacy, and to advocate against domestic violence. On the political scale women have staged their protest against logging, mining and other large-scale development that have anti-social effects on women and families (see Scheyvens, 2003). The women have also used their membership on other national women's organisations, NGOs, Synods, church boards, committees and commissions to raise their concerns.

Using this approach, ACOM women hold the view that the transformation of social issues faced by women and children could be better resolved if the social and political issues affecting their husbands are addressed. It could be argued that the Mothers' Union and the ACOM women have always been assertive in claiming their roles in the social and political arena. This is the major difference between the SSEC Women's Fellowship, and the ACOM

Mothers' Union. The SSEC women are very assertive, using their church-based beliefs and teaching to approach the social issues they face, while the ACOM women take the social and political approach to deal with the issues they face in the church and in the local community.

Conclusion

Gender relations in the SSEC and the ACOM are similar despite the differences in church foundational principles and practice. Women play subordinate roles in the local church communities to support their male counterparts, while leadership has always been within the domain of men. It is clear that the roles women play in the local church communities have the same nature as the roles they play in the home. The church has transferred the local cultural feminine roles that women usually perform in the home, and in the local communities, into the church.

There is also clear evidence of the influences the missionary philosophies and local cultural beliefs have had in shaping women's roles in the church. While the local women of both the SSEC and the ACOM play similar roles in the church, there are slight differences in terms of the nature of roles owing to the liturgical structure and setup. Further, some differences can be seen in the roles women play at the senior level of the church. While in the SSEC, the men seem to control the hierarchy of the church administration, in the ACOM, there is an increasing participation of women at the senior management level of the church. The discussion over women's ordination to church formal leadership has begun, while in the SSEC, the church has not regarded the ordination of women as an issue for the church to currently deliberate on.

However, although there are some differences, the general subordination of women is prevalent in both churches. Yet the women in the SSEC and the ACOM are not silent, but in their own ways engage in an on-going process of negotiating their own empowerment using their specific and collective gendered, cultural, and Christian values, with their respective local church authorities.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

Introduction

Subjugation and discrimination of women for accessing privileged positions and leadership roles in every level of society, including the church, has suppressed the long anticipated inclination for women's empowerment and development in the church, both at the rural and national level. From the outset, that realisation was enforced through acculturation of gendered values through Christian missionary and colonisation processes that eventually modified local cultural norms toward the reification of ideals of Christian domesticities and womanhood. A hybridised model of a *kastom*-Christian order of womanhood has emerged within Small Malaita Christianity. The study has further demonstrated that, while Small Malaita women have experienced increased levels of ideological discrimination and stereotypes in everyday life, alternatively, women have consistently sought cultural and Biblical frameworks as an effective means for self and collective empowerment and emancipation.

This thesis has compared two of the mainstream churches in Solomon Islands, the SSEC and the ACOM, dealing with issues arising out of gender relations, and the question of women's empowerment in their respective communities. It has explored the dynamics and complexity of influences bearing on the adverse experience of subordination that women experience in their respective church communities.

Gender relations is a broad field of study, but, to avoid generalisation, I decided to locate the study in Small Malaita, a distinct cultural region that was readily accessible and familiar to me. This research involved fieldwork with two local church women's groups: the Women's Fellowship of the Small Malaita SSEC Association, and the Sa'a parish Mothers' Union group of Small Malaita region. These two women's groups were the focus of this research, because of their strong and effective networks, and accessibility. Although the research included certain senior male church leaders and women leaders of both churches, the major contributors were 57 members of the local church women's groups who participated as research participants in this study. Their personal views and experiences provided the bulk of the data that was collected.

I have argued that gender relations in the SSEC and the ACOM in Small Malaita are complex, and the local women are unable to achieve equality within social spaces, the privileges of formal leadership, and decision-making both at the local and national level of the church. While local women have control over food production and subsistence agriculture, their leadership remains constrained, confined to their respective female gendered groups, and to the domestic sphere. Although churches have tried to bridge the gap, the ongoing subordination of women and gender inequalities remain a challenge for both churches to manage given their public responsibility to recognise the equality of men and women as persons created with equal values who deserve to be treated fairly. This does not imply that rural church women are passive and incapable. The local women are active, and the church women's groups are effective and embody active forms of agency through which local women advance their own empowerment to achieve their collective and individual goals.

Research Focus

Numerous concerns have been raised over the years, both within the local Christian community and the wider secular society, challenging the churches for their failure to live up to the imperative of the Christian Gospel that demands equality for males and females, as co-equals in Christ without discrimination, subordination or subjugation. This thesis has explored the dynamics and factors that have influenced and shaped the churches' thinking and social practices that have contributed to the unequal participation of women in the church communities, in the formal leadership and decision-making of the church.

Research findings

Men for formal leadership, women for domestic leadership

My research illustrates that women in both the SSEC and the ACOM experience and view their treatment by the church as unequal to the men of their respective church communities. The formal leadership positions in the church are reserved for men, while women play supportive roles in the running of the church. The structural division of public leadership and domestic responsibilities between men and women reflects the ongoing influence Christian missionary founders have had on the churches. Despite the fact that the local women were trained alongside men, the women's syllabus and training focus were designed to serve the church through the provision of necessary manual services, very similar to the roles women perform at home. Apart from that, women could serve as teachers and

instructors in Sunday schools and the youth ministry, along with their regular involvement in their respective women's groups. The creation of the church women's groups has served as conduits for women to exercise these domestic social services such as *saen-saen* and pastoral care, home visits and counselling. The church women's groups stand out clearly as the women's feminine-church, in contrast to the local church which is described by my research participants as *soihadjainge mo mwane* (the men's church).

Historical Missionary Impact on Churches

The present state of gender relations and the nature of roles that women perform in the two churches reflect the legacies of their respective missionary philosophies. As discussed in the case studies, the local SSEC women appear to be bold and assertive in their internal church-related activities such as church worship, women's Christian conventions, public testimonies, and personal life sharing. Such confidence marked out the strong SSEC evangelicalism and a clear implication of the SSEC mission policy of being saved to serve. The SSEC women have felt that by being saved by *Masta*, they have the obligation under no circumstance to be afraid but to advocate for him. This has involved dealing with the everyday constraints of family and community life.

On the other hand, the ACOM women are far more rigid and reserved within internal church public activities in terms of participation in church worship, public testimonies and personal faith witness. However, they are more assertive in their participation in external church social activities that support the social and economic development of families and communities. While they are involved in church activities, they have identified their roles much more prominently within the social field. This reflects the Christianity that was introduced by the Melanesian Mission in the mid-1800s. It is part of the wider traditional Anglican vision of the role of Christianity as an agent for programmes that can instil the "redemption of the whole man" (Fox, 1958; Hilliard, 1973; Whiteman, 1978).

What emerged from the study is that there are fundamental differences between the two churches, which have a direct impact on women's roles and status in the churches. It is important to note that the SSEC is a non-governmental or institutional church, unlike the ACOM. Furthermore, while both churches are independent churches, their international connections differ. For instance, although the SSEC has some international connections, it remains an independent island church. It has no traditional established international

network compared to the ACOM which is part of the global Anglican Communion (Interview, G. Elo, 11 February 2015)⁵⁹. Because of that, the ACOM is constantly pressured to ensure that the roles of women in formal and public leadership are improved to comply with the trend of the global Anglican Communion which advocates for women to be treated equally with men. In essence, the nature of the establishment of the church and its international historical links has encouraged the church to push for equal treatment of women and men in formal leadership positions in the church and its institutions.

In contrast with the ACOM, the SSEC deals with the roles of women in church based on what the church authority, mostly male senior leaders, hold at a given time with limited pressure from human rights or feminist ideologies. This has had the tendency to delay acceptance of the changing pattern of women's roles in the contemporary secular world. As the research has indicated, the SSEC authorities are said to have relied on the inspiration and guidance of the Holy Spirit to direct the church to indicate the time-frame of when women are allowed to be ordained, and in which types of ministries they would effectively serve (Interview, P. Maesulitala, 1 October 2015).⁶⁰

Colonialism and its Influence on Local Custom and Churches

The influence of colonialism on gendered relations and leadership both within the church and in the wider Solomon Islands society is notable. As reiterated by Soaki (2017), notions of patriarchal structure is present within the colonial institutions such as governance and the political leadership. Christian missionary organisations were agents through which colonial notions of gender relations, women's roles and status, were disseminated (Jolly & Macintyre, 1989; Pollard & Afia-Maetala, 2010). But further to that, education and the learning syllabus that perpetuated colonial notions of gendered roles were clearly defined. Intersected with missionary ideals of domesticities, conditions for work and leadership have realigned, privileging men for leadership in public sphere, while women took on a domestic role in employment such as teachers, nurses and social workers that deal mostly with families and children, and were not involved in major decision-making roles. This

⁵⁹ Reverend George Elo was the ACOM's Mission Secretary when he was interviewed. The position is a senior one within the church structure. It has direct responsibility and authority over the entire church mission. George passed away in October 2016.

⁶⁰ Bishop Peter Maesulitala is currently the deputy head of the SSEC and is responsible for the mission of the church.

colonial paradigm has shifted and affirmed cultural beliefs and values of the gendered division of labour and work.

Local Customs' Influence on the Churches

The case study has also shown that, regardless of the churches' constitutional declaration of accepting the Bible as the ultimate truth to guide the function and decision-making of the church, local culture has an immense influence on them. Although both church constitutions have recognised the equality of men and women as children of God, the local traditions and beliefs result in women being treated differently to men. In this, it is clear that the much advocated historical SSEC missionary policy of a clean break from the traditional practices and beliefs has not been followed. In general, the data has revealed that the Malaitan cultural ideology of *apu/abu* for women has subverted the church. *Apu* focuses more on defining the social roles and space of women in church and in the local communities. More specifically in Small Malaita, the control of *alahanga* (chiefly authority) over the local church is prevalent. Furthermore, there have been incidences of contentious arguments about the practice of the culture of *holikeninge*, that consequently led to certain reconstructions⁶¹ of the cultural ceremony, that suddenly compromised the conflict situation between the committed SSEC members, those that are *hans-ap*⁶² (hands up), and the so called *baek-slada* (back sliders or nominal followers).

In the ACOM, culture and *kastom* have important and influential roles in the church. Any suggestion or recommendation about the designated roles for women in the church has to be measured by the so-called *tolahani inoni* and its standard practice before being reflected upon through the relevant Biblical texts. As shown in this research, there has not been any case where a woman has been formally chosen for leadership positions such as a catechist. At the upper levels of the church, similar cultural influences are also present in the church debate concerning the suggestion that women be ordained to the priesthood.

Indeed, the research data from the case studies has revealed the greater influence the local Small Malaita culture of *tohani inoni* has in both the SSEC and the ACOM. This has

⁶¹ These reconstructions include mother's love, and *saplae* (supplies). The gifts that are presented at the wedding for the bride's parents are referred as "supplies".

⁶² *Hans-ap* (hands-up) refers to the committed SSEC members who surrender their lives to follow SSEC rules.

consequently led to the continued segregation and restriction of women from formal church leadership positions and from formal roles in all of the church institutions.

Church Constitutions

The research data have demonstrated that while in reality the church constitutions do not clearly obstruct the role of women in formal leadership, the churches have viewed the constitutions as responsible for preventing women from taking on formal leadership roles in the church. Consequentially church constitutions need to be amended to cater for women's formal leadership. This is particularly true for the ACOM. As discussed in the case studies, both church constitutions have declared the equality of both genders, men and women as co-equal, created in the image of God. Unlike the SSEC which is non-legalistic in its approach to its constitution, the ACOM has continued to view the male-gender pronoun "he" and "his" as implying the exclusion of the female gender from the church's formal leadership circle. This church view has placed the church in a dilemma between its allegiance to the Bible and Christian theology, and its constitution. It is the complexity of reconciling the church's allegiance to Biblical and theological teaching, while at the same time complying with local cultural obligations and constitutional authority, that is profoundly challenging. In effect, this dilemma does exist and affects the church's vision of the ordination of women to Christian ministries, such as priesthood, women's lay ministry in assisting in the distribution of the Holy Communion elements, and in formal preaching during church worship.

Paradox and Complications

It is clear that both churches are faced with paradoxical and complex situations. While both churches, in their own ways, have not lived up to the imperative of the fundamental Christian teaching about the equality of men and women in the church, each has its own ways of dealing with these dilemmas. One typical example of this is in the SSEC's dilemma concerning the preservation of cultural practices and beliefs in the church. Historically the church has lived and been guided by the "clean break from traditional culture" rule, a policy consolidated by its loyalty to the Bible as the only guide to matters concerning the church's faith and belief. Indeed, the rule has been compromised due to local cultural influences. This has affected church views on women's leadership mostly on Small Malaita, which has complicated women's roles in the SSEC. Further complications have resulted from the churches' literal interpretation of the Pauline instructions to Christian wives to submit to

their husbands. The interpretation demands the total submission of the wife which includes obedience and surrendering unconditionally all that is due from the woman to her husband. However, such unconditional surrender appears to have resisted and complicated the Pauline theology of baptism, which resonates with the Christian value of equality regardless of gender, social and economic status.

Likewise, in the ACOM, the church has compromised its affirmation of the Bible and Christian faith by heavily emphasising the legality of the constitution over the imperative of the Christian faith concerning gender and leadership roles in the church. Furthermore, its adherence to local cultural beliefs and gender relations has also complicated the church's fundamental constitutional obligations to perceive and treat men and women as equal, concerning the roles that men and women perform in the formal and non-formal ministries of the church.

In reality, both churches live with paradoxes that on many occasions complicate their attempt to become faithful to their fundamental obligations as Christian organisations.

Church Women and Agency for Empowerment

In conclusion, the research has shown that there is a paradox between local women's constraining situation and the desire for empowerment. Research has further indicated that despite the local women's experience of inequality in the church, both at the local and national level, the women's groups have not remained passive, paradoxically, further advance their trajectory for self-empowerment and development drawing on cultural and Christian frameworks remaining assertive and active in their own village contexts. They do so by negotiating pathways that empower them to pursue their desired objectives, plans and visions. Their empowerment, in practice, varies according to the primary objectives of the church women's groups, and the church's founding philosophies. It is clear that SSEC women have invoked their Christian identity as *hu'e maa'i* in relation to the theological conception of *Masta* to provide effective agency to deal with everyday social life both in the home and in the local community. On the other hand, the ACOM women have constantly built on their maternal cultural and Christian identities as both *teitee* and *teitee maa'i*.

Given the different forms of agency, the church women's groups have specifically approached social issues and participation in church and community life in a number of ways. For instance, the SSEC women have exclusively approached the social issues utilising the Christian teaching they have learned through their participation in the Women's Fellowship. They constantly refrain from using human rights and feminist principles to advocate against social issues, apart from the invocation of the *Masta*. This is evident in their non-participation in the women's activism programme of events usually planned by national women's organisations and international agency organisations that support women.

Unlike the SSEC, the ACOM women are more open and although they are not active in personal evangelism, they seem to be strong in social advocacy. Their committed participation in women's activism programmes and involvement in literacy schools, have demonstrated their holistic approach to social life that is inclusive of the Bible.

Empowerment is an ambiguous phenomenon. Any form of empowerment must be conducive and responsive to the cultural context. In Small Malaita, women's empowerment is pursued "to have power to" contribute to the church community. It is not sought "to possess power over" or to advocate for women's empowerment in the liberal theoretical framework and discourses. Instead, following Kandiyoti's (1988) model of "bargaining patriarchy", the Small Malaita church women negotiate their own empowerment using the cultural model of *djadjawau-djadjamai*, a local model of reciprocity, by staging and utilising their cultural-maternal and Christian women's group values to exercise influence in contributing to their church communities.

Options for Future Research

In the process of conducting this study, I discovered other important areas and sub-areas that this research has not been able to pursue, but which could be pursued by further anthropological research.

First, a study could be launched to explore the experience of local village men, against the assumption that men are more dominant in leadership and subjugate women. This could be a comparative study of the SSEC and ACOM local church leaders such as pastors and Association senior pastors, priests, catechist, chiefs and village men. Their views and

experiences could provide rich data for analysis in the exploration of the broader scenario of gender relations in the SSEC and the ACOM in Small Malaita.

Secondly, comparative research could explore church family households. This could involve methods of field participatory observations and unstructured interviews, which could gather data on the experience of SSEC and ACOM nuclear families, from the husbands, wives, children and members of the extended family perspectives. It is important that the experiences and views of members of the household are documented and covered. This is an important area to study as well, and it would contribute to a balanced view of the various forms and performances of relationship and status in the family.

It is obvious from the current literature on gender studies, in both secular and Christian settings in the Pacific, including Solomon Islands, that women and women's groups have frequently been the focus of research, highlighting their views and experiences, and their achievements. This could lead to bias in the final analysis because of the focus on one gender group; women. Nevertheless, alternatively, the prospect of keeping the women's views in check, juxtaposed alongside the men and the children's views and experiences, advances a fairer and more balanced research outcome of the broader study of gender relations in church settings in Small Malaita in particular, Solomon Islands more generally, and Melanesia and the wider Pacific more comparatively.

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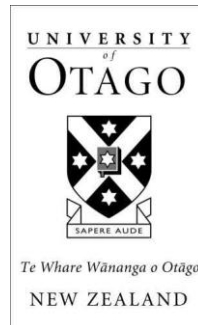
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APPENDIX 1: INFORMATION SHEET FOR PARTICIPANTS

Human Ethics Committee Reference **Number: 14/193**



Negotiating the Sacred Space: A Comparative Study of the Impact of the Dynamics of Culture and Christian Theology on Women in the Anglican Church of Melanesia, and the South Seas Evangelical Church, Malaita, Solomon Island

INFORMATION SHEET FOR PARTICIPANTS

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 and we thank you for considering our request.

What is the Aim of the Project?

Recently studies on Church women's groups in Solomon Islands have shown that gender inequality and women's subordination is prevalent in churches there. The literature revealed that this came about due to a number of factors. The practice of women's subordination is a continuum of the church's historical tradition of the colonization process of the domestication of women as taught and practised by the churches. There is also a general perception that the local traditional cultural beliefs have influenced the churches' teaching and practices in defining the roles and positions of women in the Church.

The aim of this study is to examine and consider the basis of this literature, and especially the dynamics of traditional cultural beliefs and Christian theology of the Anglican Church of Melanesia (ACOM) and the South Sea Evangelical Church's (SSEC) teachings and practices, as against the current status and roles of women in these two mainstream Churches. The research will also examine the possibility of whether the Churches see the need to empower women by removing the differences that discriminate women from men in the roles that they both play in the Church.

This research is a requirement for Ben Wate's Doctoral thesis in Social Anthropology.

What Type of Participants are being sought?

The study will involve three categories of participants. First, the leaders of the Anglican Church of Melanesia (ACOM) and South Seas Evangelical Church (SSEC) working at the Church headquarters in Honiara and in Auki, and in Small Malaita on the island of Malaita. Second, it will involve women leaders of the Mothers' Union Organizations (MU) and Womens' Band (WB) working at their headquarters in Honiara and in Auki. Thirdly, the research will involve members of the Mothers' Union (MU) and Womens' Band (WB) living in the villages on Small Malaita.

The participants will be adult men and women of the age range of 25 to 70 years. The two Churches have given consent and support for me to conduct this research (see letters attached). The participants will be recruited through verbal invitation of word of mouth. On circumstances that they could not be reached, I will invite them through letter writing and mobile phone conversations.

The research will assist the two Churches in their effort to address the issue of women's subordination and some of the findings may be used as a resource material for the Churches. The study will also benefit women in ensuring that the Churches are aware of the issue of difference in order to take appropriate actions needed to empower women to participate fully in the Church where they belong.

What will Participants be asked to Do?

If you are willing to participate in this study, you will be asked to be available an interview (for approximately one half hour), in that you will decide which space you are most comfortable with. During the discussions, you will discuss topics related to gender inequality, women's subordination, the work of the Mothers' Union (MU), and the Womens' Band (WB) and your experience of the Anglican Church of Melanesia, and the South Seas Evangelical Church's (SSEC) treatment of women. If you become uncomfortable with the topics, you will not be forced to continue. You may choose to participate in the discussions only on questions you are comfortable with, or terminate your participation at any time.

Please feel free and be kindly informed that if you decide not to take part in the study, there will be no disadvantage to yourself of any kind.

What Data or Information will be Collected and What Use will be Made of it?

The discussion will be audio recorded and transcribed by the researcher. The personal statements, ideas and understandings that emerge through your discussions will be used as qualitative data and may be included in the final thesis draft. This data will remain anonymous unless you have instructed me to disclose your identity in the research. I will seek your permission to include such details as age, gender, and profession, or other information that does not personally identify you. You may decline to have any of these details included in the thesis. You are also at liberty to correct or withdraw any contributions (statements) or personal information at any time during the project.

The final thesis draft will be publicly available through the University of Otago, however the raw data (recorded and transcribed conversation) will only be accessible to the student researcher and his supervisor at the University of Otago.

The data collected will be securely stored in such a way that only those mentioned below will be able to gain access to it. Data obtained as a result of the research will be retained for **at least 5 years** in secure storage. Any personal information held on the participants [*such as contact details, audio or video tapes, after they have been transcribed etc.,*] may be destroyed at the completion of the research even though the data derived from the research will, in most cases, be kept for much longer or possibly indefinitely.

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 so requested.

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.

This project also involves other methods of data collection including a focus group discussion. A number of open-ended questions will be asked to inquire into how you think about negotiating empowerment for women and the dynamics of Culture and Christian theology in the Anglican Church of Melanesia (ACOM), and the South Seas Evangelical Church (SSEC) in Solomon Islands. The precise nature of the questions which will be asked have not been determined in advance, but will depend on the way in which the focus group discussions develop. 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 questions to be used.

In the event that the questioning and discussions develop, in such a way that you feel hesitant or uncomfortable you are reminded of your right to decline to participate in the discussion of any particular question(s) and also that you may withdraw from the discussion at any stage without any disadvantage to yourself of any kind.

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 requested.

Can Participants Change their Mind and Withdraw from the Project?

You may withdraw from participation in the project at any time, before the thesis is completed and goes to print, 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:

Ben Wate

and

Associate Prof. Jacqui Leckie

Department of Anthropology

Department of Anthropology

& Archaeology

& Archaeology

Tel 64 3 479 8751
watbe689@otago.ac.nz

Tel 64 3 479 8760
jacqui.leckie@otago.ac.nz

This study has been approved by the University of Otago Human Ethics Committee. If you have any concerns about the ethical conduct of the research you may contact the Committee through the Human Ethics Committee Administrator (ph +643 479 8256 or email gary.witte@otago.ac.nz). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated and you will be informed of the outcome.

APPENDIX 2: CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPANTS

Human Ethics Committee Application Reference Number: 14/193 – Date: 21/11/2014



Negotiating the Sacred Space: A Comparative Study of the Impact of the Dynamics of Culture and Christian Theology on Women in the Anglican Church of Melanesia, and in the South Seas Evangelical Church, Malaita, Solomon Island

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. Personal identifying information (video recordings) 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 at least five years;
4. This project involves other research methods including focus group discussion. The questions that will be discussed will inquire on how I think about negotiating empowerment for Women and the dynamics of culture and Christian theology in the Anglican Church of Melanesia, (ACOM), and in the South Seas Evangelical Church (SSEC) Solomon Islands. The precise nature of the questions which will be asked have not been determined in advance, but will depend on the way in which the discussion develops and that in the event that the questions and discussions develop in such a way that I feel hesitant or uncomfortable I may decline to participate in the discussions or may withdraw from the project without any disadvantage of any kind.
5. 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 my anonymity, should I choose to remain anonymous.



6. I, as the participant: a) agree to being named in the research, OR;
b) would rather remain anonymous

I agree to take part in this project.

.....
(Signature of participant)

.....
(Date)

.....
(Printed Name)

This study has been approved by the University of Otago Human Ethics Committee. If you have any concerns about the ethical conduct of the research you may contact the Committee through the Human Ethics Committee Administrator (ph +643 479 8256 or email gary.witte@otago.ac.nz). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated and you will be informed of the outcome.

APPENDIX 3: RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

SMALL MALAITA

CHURCH WOMEN'S GROUPS

SSEC WOMEN'S FELLOWSHIP		ACOM MOTHERS' UNION	
Roylyn Hou	Riverside	Agness Oha	U'unimenu
Susan		Miltus Suelikeni	
Lyneth Walakulu		Mary Li'i	
Julian Hou			
Cathy Hou			Ruapu
Joy La'alaha		Monica Tea	
Indrid Houtalokeni		Mary Dorawewe	
Everlyn La'esana			
Dorothy Hare'e			Daha
Doris Heia		Nester Houalahakeni	
Clarah Koreteku			
Janet Hou			
Rhoda Hirukeni	Likimae	Monica Hoa	A'ulupeine
Betty Koloi		Heleni Maesiedi	
Mulfrey Hulangatoro		Elam Hou	
Joyce Puesango		Margaret Namoi	
Jemimah Halukeni		Lisa Hou	
Gladys Olikeni		Alice Saemango	
Beverlyn Hou			
O'u'Oukeni			
Asaneth Walani	Roone	Karry Wepulalo	Sa'a
Crisolite Pumae		Martha Halukeni	
Crysolite Tatapumae		Rachael Mae	
Crystal Siho'ohu		Veronica Toripo	
Mwa'atoro		Margaret Rewa	
Jenifer Iro		Ruth Pwaikeni	
Pricila Saukeni O'hu		Esther Lilimae	
Stella Olitoro		Mary Atkin Hoi	
Mwakaranakeni Patele		Christina Pwalo	

APPENDIX 4: THE SSEC AND THE ACOM CHURCH LEADERS AND CHURCH WOMEN’S GROUP LEADERS

RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

ANGLICAN CHURCH OF MELANESIA	SOUTH SEA EVANGELICAL CHURCH
David Vunagi <i>Archbishop (2009-2015)</i>	Peter Maesulitala, <i>Vice- Bishop</i>
Nathan Tome <i>Diocesan Bishop of DOG</i>	Misack Awaraana, <i>Senior Pastor, Roone</i>
Sam Sahu <i>Diocesan Bishop of DOM</i>	Francis Walani, <i>Assistant Pastor Roone</i>
George Elo <i>Mission Secretary</i>	Onesmus O’uo’u, <i>Senior Pastor, Likimaea</i>
Abraham Hauriasi <i>General Secretary</i>	Edwin Ahukela, <i>Senior Pastor, Riverside</i>
Mothers’ Union (Provincial)	SSEC Women’s Fellowship (National)
Mary Vunagi <i>Provincial MU President</i>	Cathy Keni <i>Women’s National Coordinator</i>
Annie Mata, <i>DOM Mothers’ Union worker</i>	