

Within, Between and Around

Genders, Relationships and Sexualities in Contemporary Rarotonga

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Abstract

Anthropologists and scholars working in the Pacific have long highlighted the importance of social and especially family relationships in Pacific Island communities, such as Rarotonga/ Cook Islands. This is mirrored in local ideas of moralities. Rarotongan understandings of moralities incorporate the local importance attributed to context, social practice, and relationality. To convey this ethnographically, I examine four of the most basic dimensions of moral life from young Rarotongan women's perspective: the constitution of a family, pregnancy before and at the age of 21, infidelity in intimate partner relationships, and motherhood. I ask: How do contemporary young Rarotongan women strive for a moral life?

I approach this question through seven and a half months of fieldwork in Rarotonga which included 22 semi-structured interviews with women between 18 and 34 years of age, and countless informal chats including deep hanging out with Rarotongan women of all age groups. I reflect on local moral "principles and challenges as they emerge in practice" (Lambek, 2015, p. xvi). In this sense, this thesis follows young Rarotongan women as they address contingencies, face challenges and obstacles, and reflect on their actions and decisions as they strive for a moral life while knowing that societal ideals and rules are difficult if not impossible to meet completely or consistently at any time within all aspects and contexts of their lives and to elucidate what happens to young women when such events are folded into young women's

interpersonal relationships. Drawing on Mattingly, Das and Mahmood's work on how women deal with socio-historical-cultural rules, norms and expectations within daily life, I argue that young Rarotongan women's moral striving is revealed in young women's work and actions out of *aro'a* for their interpersonal relationships, particularly with their family members, even in situations and contexts where these relationships are challenged and scrutinized by the involved parties. I suggest that through their actions within particular contexts, circumstances, and relationships -- their acts out of *aro'a* for others and themselves -- young women in relation to and with others enact, transform, create and negotiate local moralities.

This thesis is dedicated to the young women of Rarotonga and those who love
and care for them.

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Chapter One

Introduction

I was confronted with the complexity surrounding young women and their lives before I arrived for the first time at the Cook Islands' main island of Rarotonga. During the four-hour flight from Auckland to Rarotonga in February 2017, I was sitting next to a young Rarotongan woman who I judged to be about 25 years old. She juggled a big paper bag from McDonald's on her lap and the smell of the burgers hung in the air. She was wearing extremely short shorts and an elegant, white, body-fitting, short-sleeved shirt. Her long black hair fell loosely over her shoulders. Black eyeliner and mascara highlighted her hazelnut brown eyes and soft red lipstick subtly enhanced her full lips. After the plane took off, she slowly opened the paper bag and took out a Big Mac before she carefully resealed the paper bag. She ate the Big Mac before she fell asleep, the McDonald's paper bag still on her lap, firmly encased by both of her hands. She woke up approximately half an hour before our arrival, pulling a skirt from her handbag and asking if I could let her out so that she could get changed. On her return, she was wearing the same white shirt but her short shorts had been exchanged for a plain knee length black skirt. Her hair was pulled together into a bun and her make-up was gone. Recognizing my surprised look, she explained that she was going to see her family for the first time in two years. At the time, she lived with her cousin in Melbourne. She was not yet married nor did she have children. She was clear that I should not misunderstand her; she loved her cousin and enjoyed living in a cosmopolitan place where she could go out and follow her passion for fashion. 'But it is boring to see just him; I am really looking forward to seeing my family, particularly my parents and siblings' she said. Tears came into her eyes when she repeated 'we haven't seen each other in two years. This is far too long'. I agreed with a nod while she continued telling me that her family loves burgers from McDonald's,

which are not available in Rarotonga, and every time she returned she would buy a great quantity for them.

Her parents had encouraged her to study in Melbourne before she started to work there for a bank. Her job included a lot of traveling. She enjoyed seeing other places, getting to know other people and cultures while earning good money which also helped her family. 'I don't have the possibility to earn this amount of money in Rarotonga' she said, before asking me what I was going to do in Rarotonga. I gave her a short description of my own journey before I eventually told her that I was going to Rarotonga on a preliminary field trip to introduce my research project to governmental and non-governmental organisations and to the wider public. I explained that I was interested in young Rarotongan women's lives and their relationships with family members, partners and friends. She listened carefully and remained silent for a short while after I had finished before she started giving me a list of warnings and instructions:

Wear decent clothes to your appointments, no trousers. A knee-length skirt is fine. Greet everybody with *Kia Orana*.¹ Listen to the people you live with and follow their instructions. Do not go out alone or walk around at night; it's dangerous, and if you go clubbing stay with the group. Do not jump on a motorbike or a car driven by one man alone, they will try it. Go to church at least every Sunday morning. Do not drink the water from the tap, it comes from a tank and is also used for the toilets. Food and drinks are really expensive by a minimum wage of \$6. If you are invited, bring something and if you're inviting, provide something to eat and to drink. Help the elderly and most importantly be respectful and show *aro 'a* at all times to everybody. If you do that, you will be fine.

By the time she finished the plane had landed, reached its parked position and opened the doors. I had no time to react beyond wishing her all the best before she disappeared. Later

¹ The phrase to greet someone in the Cook Islands is *Kia Orana* which means "let life be preserved" (Savage, 2012 [1962], p. 209). In pre-Christian times Cook Islander used *Kia Ora*. When Papehia, a native missionary from Tahiti, came on the island to convey Christian belief, he greeted the local people in his own dialect *ia orana*. Over the time people combined both phrases to *Kia Orana* (Savage, 2012 [1962]; Henry, 2003).

that night, when I was lying in my bed and sleep did not come, I reflected on this conversation and started wondering whether young Rarotongan women always followed these guidelines, if everyone agreed on the same guidelines in the same situations, how these guidelines were created, what happened if young women did not follow these guidelines and how young women dealt with these experiences, considering the importance of family and community relationships in Pacific Island societies.

Social and family relationships and their moral complexity

Having been on my field site for just a short time, it became clear that local ideas of social relationships, particularly with family members, loomed large for young women living on the island of Rarotonga. On this island where the Cook Islands' administrative capital of Avarua is located, the decisions young women make regarding their everyday lives are suffused with moral connotations. Young women are called upon to try to ascertain what is best for others and themselves in the complex and changing circumstances of daily life and in the midst of several tasks and difficulties they address simultaneously. They state that they constantly feel the strong expectations society and, more particularly, their families, have for them as well as the responsibilities they have towards their community and family members when considering their wishes, hopes and goals for life. Young women's own wishes and desires for life sometimes challenge socio-historical-cultural expectations, responsibilities, and obligations. This is not to say that young women's desires and wishes exclude contributions to the family or that social and family expectations always contradict with young women's wishes and desires; rather, young women's individual desires are themselves formed from those norms and values. Contradictions and tensions often evolve between socio-historical-cultural precepts and young women's lived reality of daily life. Young women constantly scrutinize their perspectives with regards to social expectations and how to integrate them into their lives.

My introductory conversation with the young woman on the plane highlights that compliance, with the expected church attendance on Sunday, active participation in church and community activities, the contribution to the family emotionally and financially, and having a successful career needing to be carefully balanced with young women's seemingly contradictory wishes and desires of making their own decisions about what to do and how to live their life. Negotiating potential tensions between one's own desires and social approval on a daily basis is part of what it means to be a young woman in contemporary Rarotonga. However, young Rarotongan women's responses to these tensions are not only a product of cultural rules and norms, as well as social and family expectations, but also how young women make sense of and negotiate these multiple aspects within specific social contexts and relationships they themselves assist to create. Young women are not simply passive recipients of local norms, values, expectations and moral understandings. They actively participate in their creation when evaluating and negotiating how to balance socio-historical-cultural norms, values and expectations with the complex and changing demands and claims of daily life (Ortner, 2006).

In the face of often difficult and challenging situations, young women find themselves driven to imagine new ways of life or to become different kinds of persons. They are driven by a demand to engage in often unexpected, even unwanted, projects of becoming (Biehl and Locke, 2017). A demand engendering additional or intensified moral obligations, responsibilities and doubts which, too, require considerations and reimaginings of what will happen, what needs to or should happen or how one should respond to the difficulties and unexpected possibilities these situations offer as well as possible consequences of actions for their social and family relationships. Young women's efforts to negotiate their desires and social approval on a daily basis are

therefore not only part of what it means to be a young woman in Rarotonga but they are primary moral projects of becoming and living as a young woman in contemporary Rarotonga. Young women's moral lives -- their moral experiences -- and moral projects of becoming and self-formation (Foucault, 2005, 1997, 1990 [1986], 1990 [1984]) are shaped and transformed over time involving an array of people including neighbours, friends, community and church members, cultural, state and, church leaders and most importantly, family members.

The importance of social and especially family relationships in Pacific Island communities, such as Rarotonga, cannot be overemphasized. Indeed, relationships with family members are fundamental to a person's sense of self and well-being. Young Rarotongan women's thoughts, decisions, actions and, hence, their moral work seems to have far reaching influences on their own subjectivities and family relationships provoking not only a critical examination of one's own life and character as Cheryl Mattingly (2014) in her study about African American families living in the United States powerfully expresses but also the life and character of others. The young women I worked with know that family members are critical for meeting social, cultural and religious expectations and responsibilities, and that jeopardizing these relationships could expose them to accusations of inappropriateness or even immorality which may lead to rejection and isolation. For these reasons, young women carefully consider and negotiate their options and possibilities in their attempts to live a moral life. Socio-historical-cultural values, rules and norms provide important layers of social context as well as resources for these negotiations and evaluations (Mahmood, 2012, 2009, 2005). However, living a moral life as Veena Das (2010a, p. 377) expresses is "influenced by a notion of the everyday in which how I respond to the claims of the other, as well as how I allow myself to be claimed by the others, defines the work of self-formation".

This thesis explores the moral complexity of contemporary young Rarotongan women's life and relationships. I ask: How do young Rarotongan women strive for a moral life? In particular, I examine four of the most basic dimensions of moral life from young Rarotongan women's argumentative focus of debate: the constitution of a family, pregnancy before and at the age of 21, infidelity in intimate partner relationships, and motherhood. I describe where agreements and disagreements are located, how they present themselves, as well as a young woman's capacity and hence agency to navigate and negotiate these situations which create moral obstacles within their social and family relationships. I consider the ways community and family expectations can produce and generate moral obstacles and demand questioning, reevaluation and reconsideration; the resources available to young women within socio-historical-cultural rules, norms, ideals and practices and the strategies young women develop to negotiate and balance moral obstacles, as well as the ways young women's projects of self-realisation, formation and becoming encourage the creation of multiple and, at times, even contradictory and often uncertain outcomes. I show how local norms are lived and transformed in these situations, how young Rarotongan women set norms for themselves and how they are related to the way in which societal norms and ideals are imagined. The examination of these four situations -- the constitution of a family, pregnancy before and at the age of 21, infidelity in intimate partner relationships, and motherhood -- obviously does not exhaust the moral repertoire and techniques young women draw upon, but they offer insights into their complex and complicated character. Additionally, these discourses provide the framework for considerations about how local socio-historical cultural rules, ideals and practices inform Rarotongan women's lives and relationships, how they are negotiated, transformed and challenged by Rarotongan women and how they influence women's practices of living, negotiation and becoming in the appropriate – 'appropriate/inappropriate' continuum. Drawing on Lambek (2015, p. xvi), I reflect on local moral

“principles and challenges as they emerge in practice”. In this sense, this thesis is an attempt to follow young Rarotongan women as they address contingencies, face challenges and obstacles and reflect on their actions and decisions in their striving for a moral life while knowing that societal ideals and rules are difficult if not impossible to meet completely or consistently at any time within all aspects and contexts of their lives and to elucidate what happens to young women when such events are folded into young women’s interpersonal relationships. I argue that young women’s moral striving is revealed in young women’s work and actions out of *aro‘a* for their interpersonal relationships particularly with their family members, even in situations and contexts where these relationships are challenged and scrutinized by the involved parties. I suggest that through their actions within particular contexts, circumstances and relationships -- their acts out of *aro‘a* for others and themselves -- young women in relation to and with others enact, transform, create and negotiate local moralities.

Moralities in Rarotonga

As I will demonstrate throughout this thesis, the overarching framework describing young Rarotongan women’s practices of living and becoming in the appropriate – ‘appropriate/inappropriate’ continuum is negotiation -- verbal and nonverbal but mainly through practice and action -- pervading many aspects of life. On one hand, young women want to do what their parents tell and expect of them but on the other hand they also want to live their own lives guided by their own decisions. These often contradictory desires result in constant negotiation processes between what they can and cannot do as ‘good’ young Rarotongan women and how to live their own lives while upholding their social and foremost family relationships. Young women’s perceptions of where the right balance lies in specific situational contexts is to a great extent negotiated within, between and around those relationships. Young women’s moral lives -- their

moral experiences -- and moral projects of becoming and self-formation are concerned with building, maintaining, deepening, repairing and in some cases even stepping away from certain relationships. Indeed, in Rarotonga, social and family relationships provide the core and means to live a moral life (see also Horan, 2012). This focus on social practice and relationality is constitutive for young Rarotongan women's moral experiences which happen to a great part within these contexts. Rarotongan moralities seem, therefore, not solely lived according to moral concepts such as 'good', 'bad', 'right', 'wrong' or 'freedom' (see Zigon, 2014). I suggest moral experiences are better grasped by paying attention to the complexity of social and foremost family relationships and the way moral obstacles are addressed and negotiated within interpersonal relationships. This is not to say that concepts such as 'good' or 'bad' are not important, in fact they are, but a focus on the ways in which young Rarotongan women struggle to be 'good' and to be considered as 'good' by their families and the wider community (especially in moments where ideal versions of 'good' womanhood are challenged and seem impossible to meet) reveals that what is considered as the 'appropriate' or 'right' thing to do in a particular context is in practice always negotiated within, between and around relationships depending to a great part on the kind of relationship people have with others, particularly with their family members.

By locating moralities in practice and action, I adopt an Aristotelian view (Lambek, 2018, 2015, 2010a & b; Mattingly, 2014). This perspective draws attention to how moralities are lived in local social and cultural practices. It also considers how a focus on moralities in social and cultural practices might contribute to rethink the relation between socio-historical-cultural contexts with its rules and norms, and social action as well as processes of becoming, self-realization and formation. As such, it contributes to the broader question of how paying attention to moralities in practice offers insights into

people's social lives, their relationships as well as emotions and feelings. The reason for this is not to purify one universal notion of morality, but to recognize the multiplicity and complexity of meeting moral dimensions of selfhood, social encounters, actions and the involved emotions and feelings such as doubt, fear, anger, shame, desperation, guilt, grief, regret, remorse, disappointment, disgrace, withdrawal as well as joy, relief, hope, motivation and enthusiasm and to elaborate how, when and in which ways these feelings are expressed by people and how they motivate reflections on and the analysis of a particular situation and the involved people as well as how emotions constitute certain kinds of subjects and enable particular kinds of relationships.

The reflections on and analysis of a situation, the involved people, and the resulting actions of young women, however, are not static. As I will outline in more detail below, Rarotongan women's lives have been heavily shaped by the advent of Christianity, colonisation and westernisation. All of these forces have imposed certain understandings of women, men and moralities. While such understandings have undergone tremendous reconsiderations and transformations throughout time, they create important layers of social context for current discourses and young women's actions in Rarotonga. They contain, in particular, significant implications for current Rarotongan communities' understandings of appropriate and inappropriate behaviour and hence the ideal picture of a 'good' young Rarotongan woman as well as young women's understandings of themselves. Additionally, introduced technologies such as the internet and social media provide access to information about relationships, sexuality, and women's health. Movies display Western or European perceptions of the 'ideal' woman and her body, convey gender roles and norms as well as ideas of romantic partner relationships. Environmental circumstances and an increasing focus on cash economy affect daily Island life as well as family structures and size. Traveling and/or living in another country for a certain amount

of time as well as the high number of international visitors open additional discursive spaces. Local discussions about the new circumstances -- how they influence and shape the inhabitants of Rarotonga and the shift and recreation of local moral frameworks as a response to such debates -- provide new possibilities for considerations about, as well as acting and feeling as men and women. Intersecting national and transnational discourses, therefore, create multiple, constantly changing and sometimes contradictory moral “assemblages” (Zigon, 2011) forming together the local moral frameworks in which contemporary young women and the situations they are in are evaluated by themselves and others.

Throughout this thesis, I do not differentiate between ethics and moralities. There are theoretical and empirical reasons for doing so, in the same way but for different reasons, that other scholars have distinguished between them as I will outline in more detail below. In my attempt to follow young women as they address contingencies, face challenges and obstacles and reflect on their actions and decisions in their striving for a moral life, I draw on the theoretical work from Cheryl Mattingly (2014), Veena Das (2010a & b, 2007) and Saba Mahmood (2012, 2009, 2005). All three anthropologists are attentive to issues of gender, power, socio-historical-cultural structures and agency in their elaborations of how women create and strive towards living a moral life. While these scholars share similarities in their ethnographic approach of how to look at women’s lives, they draw their analysis from slightly different philosophical perspectives on moralities and virtue ethics. Adopting the Aristotelian view, for Cheryl Mattingly, morality belongs to quotidian struggles for incommensurable goods. These struggles involve relationships, and the mediation of the body and social and political discourses. The good life is understood to be lived in and with the community and directed to communal ideals that individuals strive towards even if this is a position which is difficult or even impossible

to attain. Mattingly (2014, p. 5) argues that people, nonetheless, “continue to care about and struggle to obtain some version of a good life”. Mattingly (2014, p. 206) adopts a first-person virtues approach “that foregrounds [her interlocutors] projects of struggle for a ‘good life’ that is especially directed to the care of the other, and one that takes our human singularity and the dialogical nature of our intersubjective life as primary”. This is a singular first-person moral self, an ‘I’ not in the sense of “an autonomous actor but in relationship to a prior intersubjective ‘we’ and an ‘I’ connected to significant others”, living in a world of economic inequalities, racism and other structural constraints (Mattingly, 2014, p. 204-205). A world, she shows, which remains always unfinished and is full of possibilities. Mattingly (2014) introduces the phrase “moral laboratories” as a reference to the experimental nature the struggle for a good life entails and to capture the complexities of everyday moralities within singular events.

Differently, for Veena Das (2007, 2010a & b), drawing on Ludwig Wittgenstein and Stanley Cavell, morality comes out of everyday engagements with others rather than from a higher agreed upon ideal that individuals strive towards. The realisation of moral ideas, Das (2010b, p. 233) writes, is “a moral striving that, in its uncertainty and its attention to the concrete specificity of the other, is simply a dimension of everyday life”. Taking on this perspective, the pressing question, Das (2010b, p. 233) suggests, is not which kind of virtues and how they relate to a society’s ideology but rather “how do I relate, in this time and in this place, to those who are in my vicinity”. Das (2007, p. 1) “narrates the lives of particular persons and communities who were deeply embedded” in two events -- that of the Partition of India in 1947 and the assassination of prime minister Indira Gandhi in 1984 -- describing “the way that the event attaches itself with its tentacles into everyday life and folds itself into the recesses of the ordinary”. She is concerned with the relation between the individual and the collective and describes how men and women

continue to live their lives among those who have previously been understood as neighbours and friends and who are now often known to be involved in acts of rape and murder. Narrating her interlocutors stories, she describes their moral striving towards a 'good' life and how engagements with others form, create and transform understandings of what a 'good' life means. She views these understandings as processual and constantly produced similar to her interlocutor's stories. This perspective points her interest towards time and temporality and, how time is a factor that works on relationships, allowing them to be reinterpreted and redrafted.

Engaging with the late work of Michel Foucault, for Saba Mahmood (2012, 2009, 2005), morality is about training oneself in a particular set of practices. She combats the idea that morality must always be deliberative and reflective. Instead, Mahmood argues that the intentional submission to a pious lifestyle is an expression of moralities insofar as women aspire to inhabit the norms and values to which they subscribe. Accordingly, morality is "a non-deliberative aspect of one's disposition" (Mahmood, 2005, p. 137). To illustrate this perspective, Mahmood (2005) investigates religious norms and values and shows how women's behaviour adopts and pushes back on these codes and practices. Mahmood's (2005) study reveals that an understanding of her participant's behaviour has to go beyond the, at that time, predominant conceptualisations of (moral) agency which are framed either in terms of subversion or opposition. Despite their different philosophical routes and perspectives on morality and virtues, all three authors are concerned with how women deal with socio-historical-cultural rules, norms and expectations within daily life, and thus their analysis offers valuable insights to my examination of how young Rarotongan women negotiate their desires and social approval in their striving towards living a moral life -- a life created, acted, lived, felt, and negotiated with and in relation to others.

My main thesis question -- How do young Rarotongan women strive for a moral life? -- situates my study within the extensive anthropological literature of moralities and ethics. In the remainder of this Chapter, I discuss the conceptual framework, moralities and ethics which underpins my analysis. I situate my study in its geographic, economic and political context, by outlining the major structural features of island life that form the context of contemporary young Rarotongan women's lived experiences and explain my research methodology. I do not attempt a complete overview of the broad literature of the anthropology of ethics and moralities. Moreover, I briefly address and highlight those debates and arguments most closely related to and relevant for my study. In particular, I focus on two key debates, the relation between moral agency and local values, norms, standards and criteria, and where to find ethics and/or moralities, to suggest an approach which views social relationships as sites of moral tension and solution.

Anthropological studies of moralities and ethics

In the introduction of his influential volume on *Ordinary Ethics*, Michael Lambek (2010a:1) writes:

Ethnographers commonly find that the people they encounter are trying to do what they consider right or good, are being evaluated according to criteria of what is right and good, or are in some debate about what constitutes the human good. Yet anthropological theory tends to overlook all this in favor of analyses that emphasize structure, power, and interest.

Recent anthropological studies on ethics (Faubion, 2011) and moralities (Zigon, 2008) address this challenge by “studying the ways people try to act morally and be ethical subjects rather than approaching them primarily as rational or strategic agents driven by power and interest” (Fassin, 2013, p. 249). Moral experience, practice, reasoning, and judgment are situated at the centre of anthropological inquiry. Structured around two main theoretical fields, the classical Durkheimian-Kantian (Durkheim, 1974

[1906]) definition of moral codes and duties, and the Foucauldian-Aristotelian (Foucault, 1990 [1984]) focus on ethical subjectivities and virtues, the ethnography or anthropology of moralities (Howell, 1997; Heintz, 2009) and the anthropology of ethics (Faubion, 2011) became in the last three decades one of the fastest growing domains within the discipline of anthropology (Mattingly, Dyring, Louw and Wentzer (eds.), 2018; Fassin, 2013 & 2014).

Before the ethical turn in anthropology, the topics of ethics and moralities have been either largely ignored (Fassin, 2013 & 2014; Zigon, 2007; Robbins, 2007) or thought to be studied implicitly while focusing on other topics such as for example gender, kinship, or religion (Parkin, 1985).² Anthropologists who claim to have studied morality all along seem to agree with Ruth Benedict's (1934, p. 73) definition of morality as "socially approved habits". The understanding of morality as a synonym for "socially approved habits" such as for example religious practices, reciprocity, or kin relationships, however, neither acknowledges morality as a separate analytical concept nor its distinctiveness from those habits (Zigon, 2008). According to Jarrett Zigon (2008, p. 1) it is exactly "this confusion of definition that has stood in the way of a more subtle and in-depth anthropological study of moralities" and ethics.

Much blame for this confusion of definition has been given to Emile Durkheim's deterministic vision of moral facts. James Laidlaw (2002, p. 312) stresses that "Durkheim's conception of the social identifies the collective with the good". Such a conception leaves no conceptual room for independent understandings of ethics and moralities. They seem impossible and unnecessary (Laidlaw, 2002 & 2014). Recent anthropological studies of moralities and ethics, therefore, aim to move away from

² Notable exceptions are B. Malinowski (*Crime and Custom in Savage Society* (1926) and *Freedom and civilization* (1947)), E. E. Evans-Pritchard (*Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic Among the Azande* (1950 [1937])).

Durkheim's broad notion of morality "as the codified representation of society" (Yan, 2011).³ In order to do so, scholars from various anthropological directions and backgrounds entered an interdisciplinary dialogue with philosophical traditions (Dyring, Mattingly and Louw, 2018).

Many anthropologists adopted a Foucauldian-Aristotelian perspective (using both philosophers either in combination or in opposition⁴) to develop approaches which focus on moral/ethical subjects and their subjectivities (see for example Laidlaw, 2018, 2014, 2002; Lambek, 2018, 2010a & b; Mattingly, 2014, 2012, 2010; Faubion, 2011, 2001; Zigon, 2011, 2008, 2007; Mahmood, 2005, Asad, 1993). This resulted in a move away from the collective towards the individual as well as from the social to the experimental.⁵ Pursuing a different path based on ordinary language philosophy, Veena Das (2015, 2012, 2010a & b, 2007), using Ludwig Wittgenstein and Stanley Cavell, and Michael Lambek (2018, 2010a & b) engaging with John Langshaw Austin, outlined inquiries into ethics in everyday life, whereas others focused on moral sentiments using phenomenological and hermeneutical philosophy. Jason Throop (2018, 2010), for example, in his phenomenological approach of suffering in the Micronesian society of Yap, Cheryl Mattingly's (2010) examination of African American families ways to cope or manage illness through a 'narrative phenomenology of practice', Jarrett Zigon (2011) who drew on Martin Heidegger to explore the experiences of being-in-the-world in Russia or Karen Sykes (2009a & b) engagement with David Hume to analyse the logic of the gift in New Ireland, Papua New Guinea.

³ Yan (2011) offers a notable and interesting exception from this move away from Durkheim's notion of morality.

⁴ See Mattingly (2012) as an example of the latter.

⁵ For a notable exception see Yan (2011).

Didier Fassin (2014), however, points out that Durkheim's theory is much more sophisticated and has often been simplified (see also Robbins, 2007). Laidlaw (2014, p. 21), for example, writes that the French sociologist "ended up with a conception of morality as thorough law-like as Kant's [...], but with obedience to the law naturalized into the smooth functioning of a well-engineered mechanical system". Zigon (2008, p. 36) similarly states:

The moral law for Kant is of the same order as nature. This is precisely Durkheim's position. He simply replaces Reason with society, and in doing so provides the latter with the same categorical and moral legislative priority and authority as Kant gives the former.

According to Fassin, such a perspective neglects what Durkheim (2010 [1924], p. 17, cited after Fassin, 2014, p. 430) clearly states:

'In opposition to Kant, we shall show that the notion of duty does not exhaust the concept of morality', since 'to become the agents of an act it must interest our sensibility to a certain extent and appear to us, in some way, desirable'. Such an act 'cannot be accomplished without effort and self-constraint' and 'is not achieved without difficulty and inner conflict'.

This position, Fassin (2014) argues, seems familiar to the approaches of contemporary anthropologists of ethics and moralities. Indeed, Durkheim's conception contains similarity to what Foucault later called "the conduct of conduct" (Fassin, 2014).

Pursuing the classical Durkheimian-Kantian definition of moral codes and duties, Kenneth E. Read (1955) in his still important classical analysis uses an interpretative approach to study the relation between the local moral world of the Gahuku-Gama in Papua New Guinea and their ontological view of human persons. Additionally, he compares Gahuku-Gama conceptions of personhood with what he calls the Western European conception. The latter, Read claims, view persons as morally equal by having moral value independent of status. In contrast, the Gahuku-Gama, Read argues, view moral value and difference in terms of status and role of the involved people. However,

moral value and hierarchy are not static; they change dependent on the context and the position the persons involved in a specific situation occupy in inter-personal and inter-group relationships. Homicide, Read elaborates, provides a sufficient example. Among the Gahuku-Gama it is considered wrong to murder a member of their own tribe but it is commendable to murder members of other tribes as long as they are not related. In battles, a man is expected to avoid his maternal kinsmen because of his moral obligations towards them. Thus, other members of his tribe do not have these moral obligations towards these individuals. Therefore, among the Gahuku-Gama, morality is contextual, shifting, and to some extent negotiable. Read's emphasis on relationality, context and a person's shifting and negotiable moral positions seems fruitful to my attempt of understanding young women's subject positions and the multiple assemblages with and within which young women operate.

The relation between moral agency, local values, norms, standards and criteria

Despite the aforementioned strong drive within the discipline of anthropology to move away from a Durkheimian understanding of morality and 'moral facts', following this approach reveals an interesting perspective inasmuch as socio-historical-cultural values, rules and norms can be considered as resources which inherit and provide practical possibilities. This perspective has been most powerfully expressed by Saba Mahmood (2005) in her ethnographic study of women in the piety movement in modern Egypt. Her study aims to better understand why women return to traditional Islamic values and practices, practices and values which are otherwise understood as problematic and patriarchal and therefore diminish or limit women's freedom and agency.

Mahmood's theoretical starting point is that theorisations of agency in feminist studies have often been derived from assumptions, most commonly the necessity of an individual, self-conscious subject who liberates themselves -- either individually or in conjunction

with others -- providing the capacity to act in resistance to a dominant structure. Influenced by the work of Michel Foucault and Judith Butler, Mahmood questions studies which conceptualise agency as a desire for freedom, autonomy, and the subversion of social norms. Tackling the question of moral agency, Mahmood (2005, p. 14) moves through ethics/ moralities to advocate for a conceptualisation of agency which goes beyond terms of “subversion or resignification of social norms”. Challenging Western assumptions that women’s position in patriarchal Islamic societies leave no or only little room for agency, she argues that forms of attachment to and negotiation of social norms provide spaces for women’s agency which are shaped by their own needs, beliefs, and desires. Socio-historical-cultural values, rules and norms provide a sometimes contradictory mix of constraints, resources, and practical possibilities for women’s agency. As Mahmood (2012, p. x) explains in her preface to the second edition of her ethnography, “acts of resistance to relations of domination constitute one modality of action [but] they certainly do not exhaust the field of human action”. In a similar way, Laura Ahearn (2001, p. 115) points out “oppositional agency is only one of many forms of agency”. The point of both authors is certainly not that political resistance, opposition and domination are irrelevant, but questions of local moralities and agency are always complex and contradictory including a broad range of factors such as human emotions, moral connotations, socio-historical-cultural context, and the relationships a person has with others.

This focus on socio-historical-cultural values, rules and norms as resources which inherit and provide practical possibilities has been applied by several anthropologists with a sensibility and acceptance that socio-historical-cultural values, rules, and norms are not static. Indeed, they are constantly challenged and transformed. How these processes influence the establishment of obligations and commitments and therefore certain forms

of subjectivities and how they prevent or encourage social change are at the centre of investigation. Thus, as Joel Robbins (2007, p. 295) emphasizes, anthropologists should resist “throw[ing] out the Durkheimian baby with the bathwater of too rigid models of cultural reproduction”. Indeed, as Lambek (2010a, p. 28) points out:

[T]here is no great methodological danger in dissolving the ethical into the social once the social is conceived as (Aristotelian) activity, practice, and judgement rather than (Kantian/Durkheimian) rule or obligation.

Following up this idea and arguing for ethics as immanent, a constitutive element of social life, Lambek (2018, p. 139; see also Lambek, 2010b) considers morality as a “function of action and criteria”. Such a perspective, Lambek (2018, p. 139) explains, “is less static, less determined and less mechanical” than Durkheim’s view on morality as a “function of rules or structure”.

Drawing on Aristotle’s practical judgement theory, Michael Lambek (2018, p. 139) suggests a middle path between two perspectives on ethics -- one that considers the ethical path as the rigid following of rules whereas the other considers it as the freedom, need or courage to “ignore, subvert, reinvent or transcend rules”. He argues that every situation demands ethical judgment about what one can and cannot do but evaluations of these judgements -- if they are right or wrong -- are not straightforward, indeed, they are open to challenge and debate. “For Aristotle [he continues] it is a matter of finding the right balance to fit the circumstances” because “the good or right thing to do in a given set of circumstances, or how to do it, is not always obvious” (Lambek, 2018, p. 140). With this statement, Lambek indicates a limitation of certain readings of Aristotle, namely the assumption that the virtuous person responds more or less smoothly to given circumstances. In fact, as I will show throughout this thesis, in Rarotonga it is a process of constant struggle characterised by doubt and ambiguity. Young Rarotongan women engage in constant negotiation processes to make sense of a certain situation (considering

what and whom it involves), to evaluate what is the ‘good’ or ‘right’ thing to do in a specific situation and how this can be balanced appropriately with wishes and desires which seem to contradict social expectations.

Desires mirror what matters most to people as they are culturally and morally shaped. They can also involve a “capacity to aspire” (Appadurai, 2004, p. 59). As Mahmood (2005, p. 15) points out, “it is important to interrogate the practical and conceptual conditions under which different forms of desire emerge”. Desires, as Robbins (2018, p. 155) indicates, are closely related to the moral, and investigating this connection involves the examination of local values because they have the capacity “to act as drivers of people’s moral behaviours”. Values play an integral part in the formation of desires. Values enact a person’s moral motivation to act and in this sense his or her desire to do what is good. Though as Robbins (2018, p. 155) importantly points out: “[w]hat people actually do will depend not only on how they [negotiate and] balance the competing desires different values awaken within them, but on how they [negotiate and] balance these desires with the feelings of duty different moral facts also arouse”.⁶ Young Rarotongan women often told me that they feel the duties and responsibilities for their families and communities very strongly, yet the ways in which to balance and negotiate their moral responsibilities and obligations for others with competing desires is context-specific and negotiated in practice through actions. The relationship between what young women value and desire and what they finally do -- their moral actions -- is very complex.

Lambek (2018, p. 138) argues that moralities are “a constitutive dimension of social life, neither transcendent of it nor a detachable part of it”. Indeed, moralities are intrinsic to human practice and action irrespective of whether people are acting in ways

⁶ In his analysis of values in everyday life, Robbins (2018, p. 155) follows Durkheim’s definition of moral facts as “ones that awaken in people a combined sense of both duty and desire”.

that they or others consider as particularly ‘moral’ or morally positive at any given moment (Lambek, 2018, 2010b). Moralities, Lambek (2010b, p. 42) continues, include judgements: judgements of “situations, actions, and, cumulatively, actors, persons, or character”. Moral practice and judgment entails, therefore, reflection and acknowledgment of “what one is about to do, is doing or has done” (Lambek, 2018, p. 141).

Judgement is both of others, thus social and conventional, and for oneself, thus linked to freedom and self-fashioning, but also to responsibility, care guilt, forgiveness, and insight, and to recognizing the limits of what one can know or do or understand (Lambek, 2010b, p. 43).

Judgement can be seen as one way in which in Rarotonga parents, families and communities may influence or even coerce young women to behave in ways which are socially and culturally considered appropriate. The correctness or appropriateness of a person’s judgements is, however, a constant subject of debates and the moral lives from engagements in these debates to the same extend as it subsists in following a particular way (Lambek, 2018).

In Rarotonga, actions are considered as more important than words and local moralities are expressed and revealed in social practices -- what people do -- rather than through what people say particularly when negotiating their interpersonal relationships. ‘One says one thing but does another’ is an expression I have heard very often from people in Rarotonga. Therefore, it is not surprisingly that actions instead of actors, particularly their words, are more frequently evaluated and that these evaluations of actions provide the basis to categorise people. Nevertheless, the evaluation of actions is sometimes expressed through words and as Lambek (2010a, p. 5) powerfully claims, speech in this sense is action and hence social practice. Speech, he argues, reveals moralities and brings the subsequent actions into being. As Lambek shows, speech itself constitutes moral

action while being at the same time the main motivator of moral action and practices. Thus, speech and language are only one means to reveal local moralities and criteria to evaluate practice and action. The emphasis on social practice in Rarotongan society foregrounds young women's practical actions and social experiences particularly when negotiating their interpersonal relationships. Indeed, similarly to what Bradd Shore (1990, 1982) discovered in Samoan society, it appears that young Rarotongan women's moral work is not driven by abstract values out of context but moreover by practical dilemmas arising from specific contexts; for example to respond to a blood relative, who has never been a part of their life, with a welcoming and caring attitude or with anger and disregard. As such, young Rarotongan women's moral works are context specific conflicts between distinctive forms of social practices and action intimately tied with emotions and feelings. It is not simply about following the rules. Instead, it is about doing the 'best good' in this particular moment in time, within the particularities of the circumstances including the social-historical-cultural context and interpersonal relationships (Mattingly, 2014).

Where to find ethics and/or moralities?

Whether ethics should be distinguished from moralities is a highly contested point of anthropological debate. Jarrett Zigon (2011) argues that various discourses, practices, and processes assemble in a particular context, but how these are used by individuals constitutes what is considered as moralities within a particular society. Accordingly, Zigon (2011) explains, local understandings of moralities contain three different aspects -- the institutional, the public discourse, and non-conscious embodied dispositions. Each aspect offers a spectrum of possibilities for what can be recognized as moralities within a particular social context. In his influential article *Moral Breakdown and the Ethical Demand*, Jarrett Zigon (2007, p. 133) claims that "[t]he need to consciously consider or reason about what one must do only arises in moments that shake one out of the

everydayness of being moral” -- a moment he calls the “moral breakdown”. In the moment of a moral breakdown, local morals reveal themselves because socio-historical-cultural rules and norms can no longer be unquestionably and unproblematically followed and people are forced to step out of their unreflective everydayness, consider rules and norms, think through their options and possibilities, figure out the consequences and respond to their dilemmas, troubles or problems. They need to find a way to “move on” and return to the unreflective everydayness of being moral (Zigon, 2007, p. 140). It is particularly in those moments that ethics are performed. Ethics, Zigon (2011, p. 5) points out, are “those intentional and reflective tactics and practices utilized in moments of ethical demand when a person needs to work on herself in order to be with herself and others morally. Ethics is a process of working on oneself in order to remake oneself, even if ever so slightly, into a new moral person”.

The separation Jarrett Zigon suggests, in conformity with German philosopher Martin Heidegger, seems to be the most radical whereas anthropologists such as Webb Kean (2016) and James Laidlaw (2014 & 2018) engage with the British philosopher Bernhard Williams to differentiate between ethics and moralities. Ethics, the latter two argue, involve questions around how one should live, and moralities refer to the, in different times and places, developed answers to this question. From the authors’ perspective, distinguishing ethics from moralities supports a comparative analysis of the in different places historically produced moral systems.

Others have rejected such a differentiation. Lambek (2018, 2010a & b), for example, views the division of ethics and moralities as problematic because those employing it tend to discard the occurrence of ethics in everyday life. Ethics, Lambek (2010a, p. 3) explains, may seem to be more apparent in unusual circumstances or in moments of moral breakdown but they are “drawn into and drawn from the ordinary”.

Cheryl Mattingly (2014) in her influential analysis of African American families who struggle for a good life in the face of often unbearable pain and loss in their experiences of parenting an ill child, follows Lambek and elucidates the appearance of moralities in everyday life insistently. Mattingly (2014) attends to mundane moments of family life such as a soccer game or daily rituals of home care to show that ordinary routines of family life are crucial for ongoing, indeterminate processes of moral becoming. In doing so, she remarkably reveals these moments as moral spaces of experimentation, striving and possibility. Mattingly's starting point of analysis, however, needs further attention because parents' confrontation with their child's illness can be categorized as a moral breakdown or at least as a rupture out of ordinary life. It seems questionable that a focus on everyday life alone would justify the rejection of a division between ethics and moralities. I instead return to Lambek (2018, p. 152), who continues to argue that action, feelings and intention are interconnected and processes of doing, feeling and evaluating within a particular situation take often place simultaneously -- "doing the right thing, feeling the right way about it and doing it for the right reasons". This view questions a strong distinction between moralities (habitual conventions) and ethics (evaluation of the situation by stepping out of the action).

While I am highly sympathetic to Lambek's approach to locating ethics within action, his, among others', understanding of moralities and/or ethics focuses to a great part on the autonomous individual. The ways Rarotongan people understand moralities or ethics and choose to respond to their dilemmas, troubles or problems (in everyday life situations and moments of moral breakdown) depend, however, not solely on autonomous decision-making or only individual choice but are also influenced by socio-historic-cultural conditions and social-cultural institutions centering on families.

In Rarotonga, as well as in other Polynesian societies, ethical considerations about what ought to be done are not self-regarding. These considerations always include others. In fact, as Sherry Ortner (2006, p. 130) in a different context points out, social agents “are always involved in, and can never act outside of, the multiplicity of social relations in which they are enmeshed” (see also Moore, 2007). In this sense, a person’s (moral) experiences are always “situated *within* relationships and *between* persons” (Jackson, 1996, p. 26, *italics* in original; see also Zigon, 2014). Thus, how relationships are formed, developed, maintained and break in situations of moral tension as well as how particularly those relationships might offer solutions out of moral tension has not always been captured.

Social relationships as sites of moral tension and solution

Scholars working in the Pacific have long agreed that solely autonomous individual approaches to understanding subjectivities and their lived realities are hardly sustainable in Pacific island societies (see Horan, 2012; Alexeyeff, 2000; Tcherkézoff, 1993; Mosko, 1992; Roland, 1988). The understanding of a relational constituted person has been put forward most notably by Marilyn Strathern. In her influential book *The Gender of the Gift*, Strathern (1988, p. 13) demonstrates that in Melanesian societies the perception of dividual identity seems to be more appropriate than the Western understanding of individual identity.

Far from being regarded as unique entities, Melanesian persons are as dividually as they are individually conceived. They contain a generalized sociality within. Indeed, persons are frequently constructed as the plural and composite site of the relationships that produced them. The singular person can be imagined as a social microcosm.

In the same vein, Jeannette Mageo (1998, p. 5) describes the self of Samoan people as sociocentric, not egocentric (see also Shore, 1981). Adopting this perspective, Jukka

Siikala (1991, p. 35) states that in the Cook Islands genealogy and kin relationships are “seen as the basic means of identifying a person”.

The same applies to ideas of moralities. Rarotongan understandings of moralities are better grasped by incorporating the local importance attributed to context, social practice, and relationality. Young Rarotongan women place great importance on their relationships with and care for their family members. As their stories reveal, young women’s moral obstacles are situated and contained to a great extent within these contexts. Their considerations and negotiations of available choices in moments of moral dilemma and the resulting decisions involve both women’s individual desires and the expectations others have on them, as 28-year old Mereani points out:

We have to consider our families and the certain things we can’t do or certain things we have to do. Like, you can’t really decide fully unless you take them into account and how they’re going to react and how they will be reflected or how we would be a reflection of them.

A precedence of the individual over others cannot be assumed and a person’s decision-making processes and actions are dynamically and powerfully intertwined with local context-specific socio-historical-cultural rules, norms, values and hence moralities. As I will elucidate throughout this thesis, young women’s moral lives -- their moral experiences -- and moral projects of becoming and self-formation are concerned with building, maintaining, deepening, repairing and in some cases even stepping away from certain relationships. Young Rarotongan women choose to overcome their moral obstacles within their social relationships by deciding, for example, not to act against parents who took their child away or to stay with a partner who cheated on them or to turn away from people who might have supported them. Accordingly, young Rarotongan women’s decisions and plans for action are complex and constant negotiation processes of experiencing and thinking of themselves and others within a context where relationality

is considered to be of key social value. Young women reflect on and combine multiple aspects of both individual desires and the expectations of others and “deploy the resulting cultural repertoires in performative and strategic ways” (Moore, 2015, p. 68). Such a perspective presupposes the maintenance and establishment of relationships. Maintaining and establishing relationships can therefore be considered as the core process of making and remaking moral persons. Indeed, similar to other Pacific islanders, Rarotongan people define a person as a locus of relationships (see Horan, 2012; Lieber, 1990; Shore, 1982).

Throughout this thesis, I argue that young women’s moral striving is revealed in young women’s work and actions out of *aro’a* for their interpersonal relationships particularly with their family members, even in situations and contexts where these relationships are challenged and scrutinized by the involved parties. I suggest that through their actions within particular contexts, circumstances and relationships -- their acts out of *aro’a* for others and themselves -- young women in relation to and with others enact, transform, create and negotiate local moralities.

Before delving deeper, it is necessary to situate my study in its geographic, economic and political context, by outlining the major structural features of island life that form the context of contemporary young Rarotongan women’s relationships and lived experiences.

Setting the scene

Dispersed over two million square kilometers with approximately 233 square kilometers of land mass located northeast of New Zealand between American Samoa and French Polynesia, the Cook Islands (Cook Islands Māori: *Kūki ’Āirani*) are an East Polynesian island state in the South Pacific Ocean. Named after Captain James Cook who visited several of the islands between 1773 and 1777, the fifteen islands are

geographically divided into the southern and the northern group. Both have an individual physical structure and history, and are distinct in their social, cultural and economic activities. Both groups remain relatively isolated from each other.

The northern group consists of seven coral atolls or sunken volcanoes named Tongareva or Penrhyn (226 inhabitants), Manihiki (212 inhabitants), Pukapuka (444 inhabitants), Rakahanga (83 inhabitants), Nassau (78 inhabitants), Palmerston (58 inhabitants) and Suvarrow (uninhabited).⁷ The southern group, where the greatest part of the population lives, consists of one volcanic island and seven atolls named Rarotonga (13,007 inhabitants), Mangaia (499 inhabitants), Atiu (434 inhabitants), Ma'uke (297 inhabitants), Mitiaro (155 inhabitants), Aitutaki (1,941 inhabitants), as well as Manuae and Takutea (both uninhabited). It was not until 1888 that both groups were officially united as the Cook Islands under British protectorate. In 1901 they were annexed to New Zealand. Since 1965, the Cook Islands are an independent, self-governed group of islands connected in 'free association' with New Zealand (Crocombe and Holmes, 2014a, b, c; Scott, 1991; Gilson, 1980). This state relationship means that Cook Islanders have complete local political autonomy and are holders of dual Cook Island and New Zealand citizenship. This means that the people of the Cook Island are free to live and work in New Zealand.

The Cook Islands population is largely diasporic. This is mainly because the limited amount of arable land, natural disasters and high transportation costs restrict possibilities of economic development (Alexeyeff, 2009b). With an approximate number

⁷ If not stated otherwise all statistic data in this section is retrieved from: Cook Islands Statistics Office (2018). Cook Islands Population Census 2016. [http://www.mfem.gov.ck/images/documents/Statistics_Docs/5.Census-Surveys/6.Population-and-Dwelling_2016/2016_CENSUS_REPORT-FINAL.pdf; accessed 27/11/2019]

of 61,839⁸, more Cook Islanders live in New Zealand than in the Cook Islands (approximately 17,434 including 2,599 visitors) followed by 22,228⁹ residing in Australia. However, I would suspect this number has increased in recent years. Along with economic reasons, a large number of mostly young people under 35 years of age have decided to move overseas for reasons such as better access to higher education, specialist medical treatment or individual choice. Additionally, many Cook Islands women travel overseas to give birth (see also Herman, 2013). Given the high mobility of Cook Islanders, a truly accurate count of the island state population is nearly impossible.

Rarotonga, where the administrative capital Avarua is located, is the largest of the fifteen Cook Islands and the centre of commercial and government activities. It provides a home to around three-quarters of the country's inhabitants. A large proportion of the migrants are from the outer islands who came for economic or educational reasons. Their situation is difficult. As land is inalienable throughout the Cook Islands, they have no access to land unless it has been gifted to them or they marry into a Rarotongan family. Fourteen per-cent of the total population are of other ethnic origin including *Papaā* expatriates who reside mainly in Rarotonga.¹⁰ Rarotonga is also the prime destination of international visitors and Cook Islanders who live overseas (168,833 in 2018¹¹) visiting the islands. Its international airport is the most important point of entry into the country. Additionally, Rarotonga is the venue of most of the national celebrations such as the annual celebration of the Constitution Day. As a focal point of both the nation's other

⁸ 2013 Census QuickStats about culture and identity. [<http://archive.stats.govt.nz/Census/2013-census/profile-and-summary-reports/quickstats-culture-identity/pacific-peoples.aspx>; accessed 27/11/2019]

⁹ Batley, J. (2017). What does the 2016 census reveal about Pacific Islands communities in Australia? [<https://devpolicy.org/2016-census-reveal-about-pacific-islands-communities-in-australia-20170928/>; accessed 27/11/2019]

¹⁰ The term *Papaā* is used on the island for white European foreigners (Savage, 2012 [1962], p. 232).

¹¹ Ministry of Finance and Economic Management (2019). Migration Statistics October 2019. [http://www.mfem.gov.ck/images/documents/Statistics_Docs/4.Tourism/2019/10October/Mig_Statistics_Report_201910.pdf; accessed 27/11/2019]

islands and the large Cook Island diaspora, Rarotonga, in comparison to the other islands, is characterized by diversity and a more cosmopolitan nature where all cultural influences of the nation's different islands as well as from overseas come together. This makes the island of Rarotonga a particularly interesting location to study recent challenges and transformations in local cultural meanings and moral frameworks.

The Cook Islands rely heavily on imports. Refined petroleum, electrical appliances, motor vehicles, computers, hygienic products and most basic foodstuffs are imported mostly from New Zealand.¹² Every week at least one ship arrives with long-life products such as tinned fish, meat and vegetables, milk, rice, noodles, water, soft drinks and juices as well as fresh food such as meat, fruits and vegetables. There was one time during my fieldwork when the sea was so rough that the ship could not enter the harbor for nearly a week. During that time shops had a shortage of fresh meat, fruits and vegetables. The fact that they ran out of potatoes was a major topic in public conversation because potato salad is a mandatory part of any family and church function buffet. Within their kin and social network, women borrowed and exchanged potatoes for other products to ensure their favorite dish was available. At significant costs, the other, smaller islands purchase food and other products from Rarotonga.

Before New Zealand deregulated its economy in the mid-1980s, which made it nearly impossible for the Cook Islands to compete with larger export countries such as Australia, the Cook Islands export industry relied on the exportation of agricultural products to New Zealand. Today, frozen fish and fish fillets, tugboats, coin and recreational boats are the top products which are exported primarily to Japan, China, Greece, Germany and South Korea.¹³ Pearls and handicrafts (such as carved pearl shells

¹² [https://oec.world/en/profile/country/cok/; accessed 28/11/2019]

¹³ [https://oec.world/en/profile/country/cok/; accessed 28/11/2019]

and woven mats) are the only products exported from the other islands to other countries and to Rarotonga (Alexeyeff, 2009b).

Like other small Pacific island nations, the Cook Islands' economy relies on foreign aid and remittances from Cook Islanders living abroad. The local key economic sectors are tourism, agriculture, marine resources, offshore banking and local industry and services which are mainly based on Rarotonga. The largest industrial sector is tourism which is intrinsically linked to the others (Mellor, 2003).

Gender is an organising principle of both the public and domestic sphere in the Cook Islands (Alexeyeff, 2009b). The majority of jobs as well as duties and tasks are gender segregated. In the domestic sphere, women are considered to be responsible for tasks inside the house, such as cooking, cleaning and washing, while men are supposed to do the outside work such as planting and fishing. The responsibility for childcare is often split between women and grandmothers. Men are not considered to have a main role in raising children. Although this perspective starts to change slowly and more and more young fathers can be seen walking around with a pram and spending time with their children at the playgrounds. On the labour market, men dominate in the areas of construction work, craft, agriculture and fishing. Women work predominantly in service occupations such as shop assistants, banking, housekeeping, caregiving, as clerical support workers and as nursing or teaching professionals. Management positions are nearly equally occupied by men and women but men outnumber women significantly in

self-employment. More women than men categorized themselves as unemployed.¹⁴ One third of unemployed men and women are aged between 15 and 24 years old.¹⁵

Cook Islands Māori and English are the official languages of the Cook Islands. Cook Islands Māori is the indigenous language but each island has a specific dialect and the words used for certain circumstances can be different. It seems reasonable to assume that Cook Islands Māori is the first language of each inhabitant. While this is certainly the wish of families and the government, the truth is that a great proportion of the younger generation expresses great difficulties in speaking the language and are more comfortable speaking English. This does not mean that they do not understand Cook Islands Māori, which they do, but that they are not confident in speaking the language, as 25-year old ‘Ari explains:

I am proud to be a Cook Islands woman. I was born and raised here. I know the language but I don’t know how to speak. We grew up learning English. English was everywhere. English was at school. It was compulsory for us to speak the language at school. Our parents talked to us in Māori. We understand it but required was English.

Older women told me that during their youth it was forbidden to speak Cook Islands Māori in school. Today, Cook Islands Māori is a subject which children study alongside all other subjects such as math, history and biology. But the main language spoken in schools is English. As there are only limited possibilities on the island for higher education and parents expect their children to study overseas, parents also prioritize the

¹⁴ According to the International Labour Organisation (O.E.C.D.) people who were not in paid employment or self-employed and categorized themselves as available and actively searching for a job are considered as unemployed. [https://www.oecd.org/statistics/data-collection/Population%20and%20Labour%20Force%20Definitions-Eng.pdf; accessed on 28/11/2019].

¹⁵ Cook Islands Statistics Office (2018). Cook Islands Population Census 2016. [http://www.mfem.gov.ck/images/documents/Statistics_Docs/5.Census-Surveys/6.Population-and-Dwelling_2016/2016_CENSUS_REPORT-FINAL.pdf; accessed 27/11/2019]

development of their children's skills in English over Cook Island Māori. Additionally, official governmental issues are dealt with in English.

However, Cook Islands Māori remains the main language of the Cook Islands Christian Church as well as in traditional contexts such as speeches during weddings and other special events. Depending on the age of the participants, community meetings are also held in Cook Islands Māori. Daily conversations particularly among the older generation consist of both Cook Islands Māori and English. If older people did not want me to understand what they were talking about they often switched to Cook Islands Māori. This happened often in situations when they spoke about people I knew as well. I studied Cook Islands Māori prior to my arrival on Rarotonga but my knowledge was rudimentary and remained limited to specific words and phrases. The majority of people, especially in Rarotonga, speak English fluently and this was the main language of my fieldwork.

Over the last few decades, the Cook Islands have welcomed various communication and entertainment technologies. Mainly in Cook Islands Māori, Radio Cook Islands broadcasts a mix of local and international news, discussions about topics of national interest and plays popular Island songs. There are around eleven local and international radio channels available in Rarotonga and they are heard in most households and workplaces. Cook Islands Television (CITV) streams a mix of local and overseas news and programs as well as major sport events in both languages. A lot of households use the pay TV services of Sky TV and view channels from overseas. There are two local newspapers published in English. The weekly paper, *Cook Island Herald*, focuses on local news and the daily paper, the *Cook Islands News*, provides information about topics of national and international concern. Nearly all households have access to information communication technology. Four out of five people own mobile phones, and more than half of the population has a phone/fax at home. Forty-one per cent of the households have

access to internet or Wi-Fi connections.¹⁶ The internet, including social media, has become the main source of communication and information especially for the younger generation.

Historically, each of the inhabited islands was a separate political entity with its own laws, customs, traditions, dialects and social structure. They were governed by a hierarchy of chiefs respectively lead by the Paramount Chiefs -- *Ariki*. Rarotonga as the biggest of all islands was ruled by six *Ariki* and divided into three districts: Takitumu, Avarua or Te Au o Tonga and Arorangi or Puaikura. The districts are further divided into 40 *tapere* (sub-districts or villages). Based on a stream and headed by a sub-chief (*Mataiapo* or *Rangatira*), each *tapere* was home of a major lineage or descent group (*ngati*) (Herman, 2013; Alexeyeff, 2009b; Crocombe and Crocombe, 2003; Gilson, 1980). Spiritual and physical spheres of life were inseparably entwined. To create the right spiritual atmosphere for action and to ensure the support of the gods and spirits for those actions, rituals, rites, ceremonies and prayers pervaded everyday life (Crocombe and Holmes, 2014a; Makirere, 2003). The close relationship between spiritual and physical spheres is still present and some of these practices are upheld today.

Following Captain Cook's visits in 1773 and 1777, several European traders and whalers visited the Cook Islands before the first Christian missionaries from the London Missionary Society (L.M.S.) arrived in Aitutaki on 26 October 1821. Two years later, in 1823, Reverend John Williams reached Rarotonga. He left Papehia, a native teacher from Tahiti, on Rarotonga to set up a permanent religious settlement until his own return in 1927 (Crocombe & Holmes, 2014c; Henry, 2003 & 2002; Maretu, 1983 [1871]; Gilson, 1980; Rere, 1980). Over time, as Christianity was fully embraced, it led to a plethora of

¹⁶ Cook Islands Statistics Office (2018). Cook Islands Population Census 2016. [http://www.mfem.gov.ck/images/documents/Statistics_Docs/5.Census-Surveys/6.Population-and-Dwelling_2016/2016_CENSUS_REPORT-FINAL.pdf; accessed 27/11/2019]

social, cultural, political, economic and, of course, religious changes in the islands. Gender relations, sexuality and marriage practices were all affected by the conversion of the people to Christianity. Missionaries also introduced a formal education system, formulated laws, and organised a judicial system (Vai‘imene, 2003). Alliances between missionaries and the *Ariki* have been established and one result was “the heightening of the powers of the chiefs, some of whom became judges as well as deacons in the church” (Crocombe, 1983, p. 20). Sissons (1999, p. 12) states that the alliances between the *Ariki* and the missionaries introduced “radical social changes. [...] Representations of traditional gods were burned, *marae* were abandoned, and villages were relocated near the mission houses and chapels” (see also Makirere, 2003; Maretu, 1983 [1871]; Rere, 1976). Richard Gilson (1980, p. 29) explains that new regulations were added to the laws:

An eight o’clock curfew was invoked, sensual dancing was prohibited, *kava*-drinking was suppressed, and certain ‘barbaric revivals’ (including the wearing of flowers and the use of coconut oil) were outlawed as they came to the attention of the missionaries. Many of these laws sounded unbelievable to outsiders when they were published abroad. For example, a man was fined if he was caught after dark with his arm around a woman’s waist, unless he was carrying a torch in the other hand. If a man wailed over the corpse of a dead woman to whom he was not related, it was taken for granted that he had been conducting an illicit affair with her, and he was fined accordingly. Perhaps no other aspect of the mission regime was used so widely to ‘prove’ that the L.M.S. were employing tyrannical methods.

Eventually, the London Missionary Society became the Cook Islands Christian Church. Josephine G. Baddeley (1978, p. xvi) describes the Cook Islands Christian Church as an institution which had “so successfully [...] combined elements of the European and Māori cultures to become one of the most powerful faces in society”. For this reason, the Cook Islands Christian Church “is now regarded as indigenous” (Baddeley, 1978, p. xviii). With nearly half of the population behind it, the Cook Islands Christian Church remains

the largest religious denomination in the islands today.¹⁷ In addition there are congregations of Roman Catholics, Anglicans, Seventh Day Adventists, the Assembly of God, the Baptist Church, the Church of Latter-Day Saints, the Apostolic Church, the Baha'i faith and Jehovah's witnesses (Kingstone, 2005 [2001]; Makirere, 2003).

The contemporary Cook Islands are a devoutly Christian nation where “[r]eligious belief and practice pervade many aspects of everyday life [...]. All community events, staff meetings, dance group practice, even drag competitions begin and end with a prayer” (Alexeyeff, 2009a, p. 116).

Christian norms and values

For the success of Reverend John Williams religious objectives, it was imperative that Rarotongan people not only lived their daily lives according to Christian principles and rules, but that they also accepted a moral code of behaviour based on European philosophy and Christian principles. For this reason, Williams formulated the “First Set of Mission Laws” which was discussed with and embraced by the *Ariki* in the late 1820s (Henry, 2003; Brown, 1964). The laws related to theft, trespass, lost and stolen property, the breaking of the Sabbath, rebellion, marriage and adultery (Williams, 1998 [1837]). Missionaries encountered many problems in their attempt to govern, adjust and transform local moral perceptions and practices into a moral code in line with European Christian values and norms. Polygamy was perhaps one of the most difficult problems the missionaries faced and addressed by law. According to the general European perception, polygamy was immoral and had to be abolished. Missionaries did not consider the wives sharing a man as immoral, but rather they blamed the men who had to give up all but one

¹⁷ Cook Islands Statistics Office (2018). Cook Islands Population Census 2016. [http://www.mfem.gov.ck/images/documents/Statistics_Docs/5.Census-Surveys/6.Population-and-Dwelling_2016/2016_CENSUS_REPORT-FINAL.pdf; accessed 27/11/2019]

wife before they could be baptised into the Church. The remaining women and their children had to leave and live in another location (Henry, 2003; Williams, 1998 [1837]; Ama, 2003). While it seems that only men had several wives, Maretu's (1983 [1871]) description of a woman who had two husbands suggests that the ruling applied to both men and women.

Before the arrival of Christianity, there was no stipulated limit to how many wives a man could have.¹⁸ The only principle was that a man should be able to economically support and physically protect all his wives and children. While missionaries' thoughts and objectives in regards to abolishing polygamy were based upon sexual considerations, Howard Henry (2003) notes that several sources from that time indicate that women were not concerned if their husbands had several wives. In fact, Henry (2003) points out, women welcomed this custom because the relationship between husband and wife did not resolve simply around sex. It rather seems that the husband-wife relationship was based around the constitution of long lasting and stable economic and social alliances between families centring the building and maintenance of relationships between family members.

Therefore, it is not surprising that several men, including *Ariki Makea Pori*, refused to give up their wives and tried to bypass the polygamy law with a rotation system. *Ariki Makea Pori* placed all wives and their children, except one, in suitable homes and replaced the one living with him every few days. From his perspective he had only one wife at a time. However, fornicating with more than one woman, the missionaries explained, was breaking the adultery law. Accepting this, *Ariki Makea Pori* chose one woman to live with him permanently and started to visit his other wives thereby breaking a third Mission law "fornicating with another woman ... in someone else's home" (Henry,

¹⁸ In much of pre-Christian Polynesia it was only the chiefs who officially married. Among ordinary people, cohabitation was the norm (see Chapter Four).

2003, p. 66). To solve this common problem and to eradicate this behaviour, the missionaries introduced a 'Church law' (without approaching the *Ariki* and the community). The Church law states that only men and women married in church could be accepted as church members and only marriages performed in church would be recognised as such. As result of the Church law, pre-European marriage practices became illegal and many couples wanted to marry in church to prove their devotion to the church through sincerity in a one-on-one marital relationship (Henry, 2003).

Another result was that through the strong alliances between missionaries and *Ariki* both the Mission laws and the Church laws were enforced with the same strength and intensity. For example, not attending church on a daily basis or scheduled church activities without a good reason was, according to the Church law, considered as an offence which was brought before the District Judge for conviction and punishment. Another example was the pre-Christian customary greeting of pressing noses (*'ongi*) while shaking hands and expressing *Kia Ora* (Henry, 2003; Jonassen, 2003).¹⁹ This physical act reinforced genuineness and expressed sincerity between two persons. Considered as a heathen act, "an offence for a Christian to commit, "[t]he '*ongi* was one of the first customs the missionaries banned and eradicated from society" followed by tattooing and having long hair as a man (Henry, 2003 p. 51; see also Mason, 2003a; Vai'imene, 2003). In their concern over the body, appropriate gender norms and moral codes, it is not surprising that the missionaries considered de-facto relationships and casual sexual contacts between a man and woman without being married as crimes (Scott, 1991). However, to whom one was allowed to be married to was also restricted. The marriage of a native woman to a foreigner, for example, was prohibited (Morrell, 1960). Missionaries considered women to be the "morally weaker sex" but lectures of the

¹⁹ Today, the phrase to greet someone in the Cook Islands is *Kia Orana*.

sanctity of marriage were delivered to both sexes and unilateral divorce was prohibited on threat of church excommunication (Gilson, 1980, p. 35).

The missionaries did not only introduce new rules for sexual partner relationships, such as changes in living arrangements and marriage practices, but they also insisted on certain standards of equality for women. In cases where husbands were reluctant to follow these standards, women were supported by the missionaries and *Ariki* were encouraged to do the same. Women became fully participating members of the church and missionaries' wives "held special classes which stressed the importance of women as 'homemakers'" (Gilson, 1952, p. 66). Later on, men and women received equal rights to claim land through both parents and the expulsion of women from their deceased husband's family land was discouraged. This led to the fact that women enjoyed greater autonomy and independence in their decision-making processes in terms of their residence and also made them economically less dependent on men.

In 1845, the Makea *Arikiship* went to a woman (Gill, 1856). However, as Richard Phillip Gilson (1952, p. 66) points out, "this does not mean that the position of women in the society was revolutionized".²⁰ Familial, political, church and social authority remained with men and patrilineal relations were still preferred (Gilson, 1980). This is also mirrored in the fact that despite the widely recognized, socially important role of Cook Island women within family and community life, research on common women's gendered positioning and common women's views about their own life's, subjectivities and relationships have been largely neglected in local representations in Polynesia as well as in anthropological literature and research (see for example Tcherkézoff, 2009; Walters,

²⁰ For explorations of women's status in other Polynesian islands after western contact see for example C. Gailey, 1980 & K. James, 1988 (Tonga); P. Schoeffel 1975, 1979, 1995, P. Fairbairn-Dunlop, 1996, S. Tcherkézoff and F. Douaire-Marsaudon 2008, L. Latai, 2015 (Samoa); J. Linnekin, 1990 (Hawai'i).

2007; File, 2003; Tupuola, 2000; Blackwood and Wieringa, 1999; Ralston, 1992 & 1989; Banwell, 1985; O'Brien and Tiffany, 1984; Tuara, 1976). This is true even though an investigation of women's lives and experiences has much to offer to an understanding of women's perceptions of self, their social and family relationships and local moralities.

Fieldwork, data and ethnographic methods

Coming from Germany and having lived in New Zealand for just 7 months, I arrived in Rarotonga for the first time in February 2017. During my two-week, preliminary field trip, I introduced myself and I was introduced to local and state authorities, different members of governmental departments and ministries as well as to local non-governmental organisations. Additionally, a local nurse introduced me to some members of the community. During these meetings, I explained my planned research project; in particular, I explained that I was interested in young women's relationships with family members, partners and friends and how these relationships have been conceptualised in the past and the present. I also discussed the desirability and feasibility of my planned research project to ensure that issues of interest and concern to Rarotongan women and the community were included in it (see Smith, 2012; Denzin, Lincoln and Smith, 2008).

In accordance with governmental officials as well as members of local non-governmental organisations, my study focuses particularly on women aged between 18 and 34. My conversation partner pointed out that this is the age group were women chose to marry or not and whom as well as the age group with the greatest number of unhealthy personal relationships. People explained that they are concerned about this age group because they are the mothers of tomorrow who will teach not only their own children but rather the younger generations in general. Furthermore, I explored and discussed ways of

networking with members of local non-governmental organisations and different staff members of the Ministry of Health to find out which approach would be appropriate to contact potential participants.

I received approval for my project from the University of Auckland Human Participant Ethics Committee and from the Cook Islands Research Committee in Rarotonga before I returned to Rarotonga for six and a half months. My fieldwork was divided into two parts. The first part of 18 weeks started in July 2017 and the second part of 8 weeks in March 2018. During this time, I conducted 22 unstructured, semi-structured and life history interviews (see Merrill and West, 2009; Wengraf, 2002) with women between 18 and 34 years of age, had countless informal chats with men and women including ‘deep’ hanging out with Rarotongan women of all age groups. I undertook various activities that informed my perspectives of community life in Rarotonga and helped put my conversations with women into perspective. I observed the behaviour of men and women involved in these activities, their interactions with each other, and became part of these interactions and the emotions involved. Living and interacting with and participating in Rarotongan people’s lives on a daily basis in different circumstances and contexts provided the basis of my ethnographic work (Bernard, 2011).

I was fortunate to live during my whole fieldwork with two local families -- a single mother (Tekura) and her 8-year old son, and an older couple (Mama Vara and Papa Tere) whose children had grown up and moved overseas. I associated myself and my own way of living as much as possible with young Rarotongan women’s way of life and tried to learn as much as possible about local social-cultural values and practices. Being a 34-year-old unmarried woman without children, I shared some of their responsibilities, concerns and joys of being a young woman in Rarotonga. I tried to be a helping hand when I lived with Tekura and her son and to be a ‘good’ daughter when I lived with Mama

Vara and Papa Tere. I took active part in community activities which my hosts and friends were involved in, volunteered at the Cook Islands Women's Counselling Centre Punanga Tauturu Inc (PTI) and participated and supported activities of other non-governmental organisations such as the Cook Islands Family Welfare Association (CIFWA), Te Kainga O Pa Taunga (Community Mental Health Service) and Te Vaerua Community Rehabilitation Inc. Living with a local family in combination with these activities placed me in a network of extended family, community groups and church affiliation. This located me within the social nexus and supported the establishment and consolidation of rapport and trust with other local residents, including authorities.

Shortly after arriving for the first part of my main fieldwork period, I learned that I could not just approach potential participants without being introduced by a local and well known third party; not only because it is considered as inadequate and disrespectful particularly for a woman of my age but also because relationships, particularly family and partner relationships, are sensitive topics in Rarotongan community which are usually not easily talked about. Indeed, the usage of the English term 'relationship' itself within my project description caused initial confusion and difficulties which are worth outlining in more detail.

The English term relationship (n.) derives from a composition of the noun 'relation' plus the suffix '-ship'.²¹ Originating from the French word *relacioun* and the Latin word *relātiōn-* or *relation*²², the term relationship is, according to the online Oxford English Dictionary, used to describe:

1. The state or fact of being related; the way in which two things are connected; a connection, an association. Also: kinship.

²¹ [<http://www.oed.com.ezproxy.auckland.ac.nz/view/Entry/161816?redirectedFrom=relationship#eid>]; accessed 20/11/2018].

²² [<http://www.oed.com.ezproxy.auckland.ac.nz/view/Entry/161810#eid25956210>]; accessed 20/11/2018].

2a. A connection formed between two or more people or groups based on social interactions and mutual goals, interests, or feelings.

2b. An emotional and sexual association or partnership between two people.²³

Since 1944, the later definition contains the most common meaning attached to the English term relationship today -- the sense of a sexual or romantic relationship.²⁴ However, the term is also used to denote all other kinds of relationships. Someone or something can have a relationship with or to someone or something, for example with people, animals, things, land, spirits, or Gods. There is no limitation to relationships between human beings. Sometimes, but not necessarily an intonation is added to the term to specify the kind of relationship, but mostly the meaning of the term derives from the context. When I introduced my topic, nearly all people assumed that I was interested in young women's sexual relationships with partners and family members indicating that the central meaning of the English term relationship in Rarotonga is foremost associated with sexual or romantic relationships. Disgusted by thoughts that I might write about sexual or romantic relationships between family members, people questioned my intentions and I never heard from some people again, whereas others gave me the opportunity to explain my research in more detail and to give specific examples of what I meant when I said I was interested in young Cook Islands women's relationships with family members, partners and friends.²⁵ This does not mean that I did not intend to ask questions about sexual relationships. In fact I did, but speaking with Rarotongan people, it soon became apparent that issues around sexuality were tied up and centred so much in relationships particularly with family members. When I asked my interlocutors which

²³ [<http://www.oed.com.ezproxy.auckland.ac.nz/view/Entry/161816?redirectedFrom=relationship#eid>; accessed 20/11/2018]

²⁴ [<https://www.etymonline.com/word/relationship>; accessed 21/11/2018]

²⁵ This does not mean that there are no sexual or romantic relationships between family members in Rarotonga but they are usually suppressed or remain in secret (see Chapter Three). One of my friends told me that "people know exactly who is involved in such a relationship but they are not proud of these relationships and they certainly do not want you to write your thesis about it".

term they would use to refer to family relationships they thought about it for a long time and came to the conclusion that they would express it in the same way as I have done in English but would use the term *piri'anga* in Cook Island Māori.

Deriving from the word *piri* which is the base word for close, near and *'anga* which adds 'action', doing, the Cook Island Māori term for relationships *piri'anga* does not contain a foregrounded sexual connotation. It is used to denote all kinds of human relations (or relations between humans), e.g. relationships between family members, friends and partners. It also highlights the importance Rarotongan people ascribe to practice and action within their various relationships. This indicates an inadequacy of the English language to express what Rarotongans express and how they express their different kind of relationships. To specifically express a sexual relationship between a man and a woman Rarotongans say *pir'iangā tane e te vaine* or *piri'anga tane-vaine*. Some of my interlocutors mentioned a transformation of meaning saying that the sexual connotation starts to become foregrounded today particularly within the younger generation. This indicates a change of meaning from primary family relationships to sexual or intimate partner relationships which happened similarly to the English term relationships. In her PhD dissertation, Debi Futter-Puati (2017) suggests the term *tu inangaro* to denominate relationships in the Cook Islands. *Inangaro* contains the meaning of affection, tenderness, love and desire (Savage, 2012 [1962], p. 72); it therefore seems particularly useful to indicate sexual or partner relationships. While no completely satisfying answer to this 'term' problem could be found, locals suggested being very specific when introducing my topic and indicated they would do the same when approaching potential participants because, as mentioned above, within most of the circumstances attempts to approach people on my own would have been considered as disrespectful and would have failed particularly due to the sensitivity of my topics.

Relationships, particularly family and partner relationships are usually not easily talked about in Rarotongan community. These topics were difficult to address with any woman in Rarotonga but even more so with young women because what some of them had to say challenged local socio-historical-cultural norms and ideals about how a ‘good’ young woman should act and behave.

For these reasons, I relied nearly completely on the network of authorities, e.g. local and state authorities, members of governmental departments and ministries, and local non-governmental organisations I was introduced to during my time in Rarotonga to get in contact with potential participants. Some of my participants were approached by an email sent by such an authority to the team leader of specific governmental departments and ministries who then distributed the request among their young female staff members. Based on the information provided in the Participant Information Sheet, the email introduced my study briefly and asked the young women to consider if they would like to participate in an introductory meeting with me where they would learn more about my study and could ask questions. I received the names of the young women who mentioned their interest in my study from the authority via email. The young women were not personally known to the authority and all further communication took place directly between me and the young women without the knowledge of the referring authority or the team leader. Other authorities who supported me relied on their personal contacts and approached these young women either directly or through their parents if they were not yet 21 years old.²⁶ Based on the information provided in the Participant Information Sheet and personal conversations between me and the authority, the authorities explained who I am, what my research is about and asked young women (and their parents) to consider if they would enjoy talking with me.

²⁶ For an explanation of the significance of the age 21 see Chapter Four.

Women, who were approached by the former means of contact, received an email from me which provided more information about myself and my study. I further suggested two alternative days for the introductory meeting asking young women to let me know which day would suit them. The women who replied to my email participated in a short 15-minute introductory session where I introduced myself and my study, handed out the Participant Information Sheet and answered their questions. The young women who then decided to participate in my study contacted me afterwards directly without the knowledge of the referring authority, the team leader or of the other women attending the introductory session, and we arranged a meeting place and time. The latter group received their information regarding myself and my study from the referring authority and I was contacted by the authority after a young woman (and her parents) had decided and expressed their interest to potentially participate in my study. The time and meeting place were arranged between the authority and the young woman (and her parents). Contrary to the other group, the introductory meeting floated into conversations and discussions about and around my research topics after young women had made the decision to participate.

I always explained the Participant Information Sheet and the Consent Form before delving into a deeper conversation. I also pointed out several times that they were under no obligation to do the interview and that they could leave at any time without giving me a reason and that everything they say and do, including if they stay or leave remains confidential between the two of us. All interviews were conducted in English and some women told me why they decided to participate in my study. The majority of young women admitted their curiosity about what I would ask and the outcome of my study. As 23-year old Puretu commented:

I am actually interested in the outcome of your thesis. Um, reading the topic in regard with the different women, I am wondering how many different relationships they have in terms of sexuality, their partners and, um, families and how they look like. So that is something I would like to learn in your thesis and the comparisons of the much older generation compared to my generation.

Others wanted to share their experiences to inform and warn other young women and/or to highlight specific difficulties they faced and other young women might face with regards to their intimate partner relationships and their family relationships. 24-year old Teina expressed another often mentioned intention, namely to use the conversation with me as an opportunity to share and discuss experiences, thoughts and feelings, and to evaluate and negotiate potential ways of how to deal with moral dilemmas within specific situations:

I think that, um, what you're looking for is, um, what I am going through and what I have been going through just recently and I felt that, um, if I talk about that, I am able to find a solution or I find a way to ... to define myself sort of thing.

The interview is a popular data collection method in qualitative research (Bernard, 2011; Bryman, 2007; Bryman and Burgess, 1999; Spradley, 1979). However, the kind of topics we were talking about did not lend themselves to what is normally seen as a straightforward interview. Instead, they were more between one- and two-hour conversations and discussions around the topics. Generally, in a Rarotongan context, the formal question and answer structure of an interview where the researcher asks the questions without giving away personal information and the interviewee answers providing personal information ignores important socio-cultural values placed on relationships. To remove the formalised setting, the interviews were conceptualised and organised as informal conversations which took place in the framework of “an act of collaboration between two peoples”, as Paula Hamilton (1990, p. 130) says, instead of the interviewer merely obtaining information from the interviewee. In these

conversations, I spoke as much about my own family, mother, father, grandmother, aunts, uncles and cousins back in Germany and my younger brother who lives in Canada as well as my partner in New Zealand who was soon considered and referred to as my '*tane*' (partner or husband), as women spoke about their own families.

The differences and similarities between me and Rarotongan women's upbringing as well as the relationship I have with my family members particularly my parents, grandparents, brother and my partner including the difficulties we went through as well as discussing and comparing the strategies I chose to overcome obstacles were part of my conversations with the young women. This approach enabled me to be viewed as an interested and respectful interlocutor by young women rather than as an unconnected interviewer asking a series of questions. This conceptualisation of the interview process and my position as a patient listener and active interlocutor instead of 'just' an interviewer meant that I also told my own stories which sometimes contrasted women's stories. While the sharing of contrasting stories could be seen as a limitation, I did not perceive it in that way; rather, it allowed me to question my own perspectives, assumptions and interpretations and to develop my ideas accordingly. Additionally, the focus on reciprocal conversations emphasizes the building of relationships between people and reflects the Rarotongan ideal of reciprocity and respect within relationships (Chilisa and Tsheko, 2014). This approach acknowledges the importance placed on relationships and their guiding principles of *aro'a* and its encapsulated values in Rarotongan society (see Chapter Two).

Another advantage of this unstructured and semi-structured, in-depth approach was that it allowed young women to drive the interview and to develop their own narratives around themes they considered as important. This gave them the opportunity to define the contexts in which their relationships are described and conceived.

Simultaneously, this approach centred women's voices and interests, as well as captured information which may be overlooked if structured qualitative or quantitative approaches were used.

Transcribing young women's narratives, I tried to preserve the spirit of the moment as much as possible by indicating emotional outbursts and breakdowns, pauses for reflection as well as by leaving filler words and inconsistencies in place.

While all of my conversations with young women went really well -- they were happy and consistently mentioned their gratitude -- and I could establish a certain amount of trust, in most cases I was not able to deepen these relationships over a longer period of time.²⁷ I saw and met these young women several times at different occasions but with most of them I met only once or twice for deeper conversations and some of them did not respond to emails or texts I sent after the interview. The majority also did not refer me to their family members and friends. It took countless chats with my hosts and friends to realize that this was not done by young women with malicious intent. Indeed, speaking with me itself can be seen as a moral struggle and an articulation of young Rarotongan women's agency because what had been discussed in our conversations was extremely difficult and it was not something usually aired publicly in Rarotonga. Meeting me and discussing their personal relationships meant not only talking about highly sensitive, private and morally loaded topics, women's real-life decisions and obstacles, but it became a moral struggle on its own which young women had to overcome. I had to negotiate how to get this data and they had to negotiate how they could give it to me by

²⁷ At the end of our conversations I asked young women if they had some final thoughts. 18-year old Vai, for example, expressed: "This was an amazing talk. I actually enjoyed your company". 24-year old Veia pointed out: "It's not a thought it's more like a comment. I really really enjoyed, um, this interview. It's really good. It's nice to talk to someone else than my mom (laughter). It's different. Yeah, I really enjoyed it. I think all women in my age here in Raro should do this interview. I think they need it". 27-year old Maara noted: "No one has ever kind of, um, you know said they're kind of thinking about what the women of this age group are going through. Probably even just treating us in a way what you are doing. [...] You don't put anybody on the spot. It's just sharing".

applying some of the strategies they would use when negotiating moralities in their social and family relationships. Despite my best efforts to protect the identity of my interlocutors -- I disguised or left out identifying features in their stories and I adopted pseudonyms in all documents including this thesis -- the small size of the island and the fear someone could identify them due to their stories added additional pressure and the danger of jeopardizing their relationships. That many of them met me only once or twice for deeper discussions, rarely replied to my emails and texts after our conversation as well as seldomly referring me on to other young women they know are understandable strategies my interlocutors used to overcome their moral struggles and to protect themselves and their families.

This clearly demonstrates the difficulty of the discussed topics -- topics I could not just openly approach and discuss with young women or any Cook Islander on the street -- and indicates some limitations of my study. Additionally, the particular combination of my age, gender, ethnicity and my position as a researcher significantly influenced the way people perceived me, the information they were willing to share and their expectations in regard to the outcome of my study. These factors appeared to set the boundaries between information I was able to obtain and information I was not able to obtain or, more precisely, between situations I was allowed to actively participate in and situations I could only observe from a distance or not at all.

I have chosen not to present the ‘prestigious’ chiefly women’s perspective which dominated much of previous research on Cook Islands women. Investigating young chiefly women’s perspectives on these topics in contemporary Rarotonga would be a valuable contribution to the existing knowledge on chiefly women also revealing much of the changes which have taken place in terms of their recognition and power, but such an investigation was not part of my study. The same applies for the perspective of Cook

Island young women living in the *Pa Enua* (outer islands) or in diasporas. My study focuses on young women who live in Rarotonga. Some of my interlocutors had migrated from the outer islands or from overseas which is mirrored in some aspects of their stories. However, their representations do not take account of the specific circumstances and experiences of young Cook Islands women living in the *Pa Enua* or elsewhere. For this reason, I will only use the general term Cook Islands if it is expressed in this way by the literature, if I talk about general things or my interlocutors expressed it in this way. Otherwise, I use Rarotonga to express the reality and limitations of my data material, analyses and assumptions. The perspectives of young men on the topics examined in this thesis also need to be captured in another study. In my chats with young men it became obvious that they also had much to say in regard to their lives and relationships.

Chapter outline

In this introduction, I have discussed the conceptual framework, moralities/ ethics, which underpins my analysis, situated my study in its geographic, economic and political context and described my research methodology. I outline in Chapter Two how ideas of femininity and being a ‘good’ young woman are constructed according to normative Rarotongan ideals and how young women have been (and are) understood in relation to these ideals as well as how contemporary young Rarotongan woman perceive these ideals and understand themselves in relation to these ideals which are primarily conveyed in the context of family relationships.

In Chapter Three, I focus on young women’s understandings of family, who is included, how one can become part of the family and which characteristics are expected from a family member. I examine how young women deal with situations where a family member did not act in accordance with their expectations on the specific role i.e. mother,

father or sibling and how that alters young women's conception of their families as well as their role as daughter and sister. Partners are not considered family immediately after a relationship starts but they might become part of the family in the future. I show that this is a process which takes place between the couple, between a young woman and her own family as well as between the potential family member and a young woman's family.

In Chapter Four, I focus on young women's experiences of pregnancy before the age of 21. I present their struggles of revealing the facts to their families, their families' reactions as well as the influences these reactions have on young women's decisions regarding abortion. I argue that a young woman's decision for or against an abortion strongly correlates with her family's support or non-support of her pregnancy and the birth of her child. This leads to the assumption that family relationships, in particular the relationship between daughters and parents, (might) stand above Christian socio-historic-cultural moral mores.

In Chapter Five, I focus on young women's experiences of serious romantic partner relationships. I present young women's understandings of a serious romantic partner relationship and how they deal with situations of infidelity. I argue that local moral perceptions, socio-historical-cultural restrictions, and expectations with whom a woman is allowed to be together correlate strongly with parental approval or disapproval. Both parental approval and disapproval provide a range of different possibilities within which young women negotiate what they can and cannot do in situations of infidelity.

In Chapter Six, I focus on young women's experiences of motherhood through an examination of the local practice of customary adoption. I explain what young women understand under motherhood and how they are planning to achieve it. Considering that giving their child away constitutes a moral action for young women, I examine how young women deal with such requests particularly from their parents and how such a request or

the knowledge that a request could be made affects the relationship a young woman has with her family members as well as her sense of self.

Together these chapters provide insights into young Rarotongan women's lives, thoughts, decision-making processes and actions in the face of often difficult situations particularly with regard to their community and family relationships. I show how young women in these situations negotiate between their desires and social approval in their striving towards living a moral life, a life which is primarily directed towards two Rarotongan key values: family relationships and *aro'a*. I finish this study with Chapter Seven, my conclusion, in which I will bring the main theoretical and empirical ideas together.

***Aro‘a* as a way of life:**

ideals of being a ‘good’ young Rarotongan woman

In order to provide some context for the discussion about how local socio-historical cultural rules, ideals and practices inform Rarotongan women’s lives and relationships, how they are negotiated, transformed and challenged by Rarotongan women and how they influence women’s practices of living, negotiation and becoming in the appropriate – ‘appropriate/ inappropriate’ continuum, it is important to outline how femininity and being a ‘good’ young woman are constructed according to normative Rarotongan ideals. Turning to mundane situations of Rarotongan women’s lives and their childhood experiences, in this chapter, I discuss how young Rarotongan women have been (and are) understood in relation to these ideals as well as how young women perceive these ideals and understand themselves in relation to these ideals. Normative ideals, as Cheryl Mattingly (2014, p. 62) states, “provide crucial guides for the telos [or the ‘good’] that [individuals] strive to attain” (see also Mahmood, 2005). They provide resources which inherit and provide practical possibilities which individuals draw upon in their day-to-day attempts of cultivating virtuous characters and the moral making, remaking and transformation of self (Mattingly, 2014; Mahmood, 2005). Joel Robbins (2018) importantly adds that normative ideals and values also play an integral part in the formation of desires. They enact a person’s moral motivation to act and in this sense his or her desire to do what is good (Robbins, 2018). Though as Robbins (2018, p. 155) importantly points out: “[w]hat people actually do will depend not only on how they [negotiate and] balance the competing desires different values awaken within them, but

on how they [negotiate and] balance these desires with the feelings of duty different moral facts also arouse”.²⁸

The presented ideal versions of how a ‘good’ young Rarotongan woman should be and the conceptual norms, attributes and virtues have been agreed upon by community members and young women themselves at the time of my study, but they are far from being universal. Despite Rarotonga’s small population, there is considerable variation across the island and its villages in terms of both ideals and practices. Additionally, but not surprisingly, young women’s lived experiences as well as their decisions, actions and behaviour do not consistently conform to these hegemonic normative ideals. Rather, these ideals are constantly challenged, transformed and negotiated by young women and the persons involved in a specific situation. Nevertheless, these ideals (even if they are difficult or even impossible to attain (Mattingly, 2014)), provide the basis on which young Rarotongan women are evaluated by others and how they perceive themselves, their behaviour and actions in the Rarotongan appropriate – ‘appropriate/ inappropriate’ continuum.

Family, gender and moralities

The family is considered a key value and extremely important to Rarotongan people. Family as a primary moral site is particularly pertinent within the Rarotongan community. It is primarily in the everyday context of familial relationships where local gender ideals and hence moralities are learned by and conveyed to young women. James and Jane Ritchie (1989, p. 103) point out that learning how to behave properly according to a specific context is “one of the most important lessons Polynesian children must master”. Moral value as well as the status and role a person occupies in a particular

²⁸ In his analysis of values in everyday life, Robbins (2018, p. 155) follows Durkheim’s definition of moral facts as “ones that awaken in people a combined sense of both duty and desire”.

situation are determined by the context in which the situation occurs (see also Morton, 1996; Read, 1955). Therefore, moral value and a person's role are not static; rather, they shift depending on the context and the relationships with the persons involved (see also Read, 1955). The significance of context has also been identified as one part of "the more general Polynesian epistemological bias that things be known in their specific contexts and through their perceptual effects in the world rather than in terms of essential, intrinsic features" (Shore, 1989, p. 138; see also Borofsky, 1987). The motivation for an action is thus not so important as its consequences and "the clearest determinant of consequences is whether or not actions are [morally] appropriate in a given context" of social and foremost family relationships (Morton, 1996, p. 79).

What is considered appropriate and inappropriate also depends on age and gender of the acting person. For this reason, it can be said that, in Rarotonga, a person is socially evaluated through their ability to behave and respond appropriately in actions and relationships in accordance with emic socio-historical-cultural perceptions of age and gender specific, norm conforming behaviour (see also Horan, 2012; Alexeyeff, 2000; Loomis, 1983). These perceptions are particularly expressed by families' strong expectations about how a 'good' young Rarotongan woman should be and how she should behave, especially towards others. Actions towards others are seen as a way to show that one's behaviour adjusts to local understandings of 'good' moralities (see Buck, 1971a [1934], p. 88). Good moralities are demonstrated through a person's actions, behaviour and gestures towards others rather than considered a sign of a person's inner moral state. However, it is thought that a person's inner moral state is mirrored in the state of a person's relationships as well as the number of relationships the person is able to properly maintain.

One way young Rarotongan women are expected to show that they follow their family's expectations of having good female moralities is through practicing *aro'a*. *Aro'a* is described by people as the basic guiding principle behind a person's actions and behaviour. Ideally it should be expressed in all social activities and relationships but the closer the relationship between the parties the more a proper demonstration is expected or even mandatory. In this sense, living and embodying *aro'a* means evaluating one's actions with respect to a specific situation and the involved people and behaving in accordance to expected and accepted gender and age specific cultural norms and values in these circumstances and relationships.

As will become clear in this chapter, the indigenous concept and practice of *aro'a* contains a number of understandings and values in regard to ways of behaving oneself especially towards others -- for example care, nurturance, share, responsibility, respect, discipline and obedience. These core cultural values and norms encapsulated in the indigenous concept of *aro'a* closely intertwine *aro'a*, gender, kinship relationships and moralities. While *aro'a* refers to everybody's moralities and is considered the main modus operandi in kinship relationships (Horan, 2017), during my fieldwork I realized that in practice *aro'a* is above all associated with good female moralities and virtues.

Aro'a

Aro'a indicates solicitude and a deep kindly feeling including the notion of affection, love, pity, sympathy, compassion, kindness, sharing, giving, helping, hospitality and care (see Savage, 2012; Rere, 1976). The different meanings which form the broad concept of *aro'a* are found throughout Polynesia: *aroha* in New Zealand, *alofa* in Samoa, *'ofa* in Tonga and *aloha* in Hawaii. Recently, transnationalism and a high dependency on tourism in most of the Pacific Islands has led to a commercialization of the concept by attaching and foregrounding a romantic connotation. Rarotongan people

highlighted the complex meaning of the concept of *aro'a* and its representation within all aspects of life. A reduction towards a romantic or even sexual sense obfuscates the holistic nature of what *aro'a* means.

In Rarotonga, the term *aro'a* is often used in conversations about a person's actions and behaviour in relationships -- mostly to explain the reason behind a person's actions -- but rarely within relationships. It does not convey a sense of 'being in love' with a person, but *aro'a* can refer to divine love; love for God or a spiritual connection to the homeland (Savage, 2012; Alexeyeff, 2004). A kiss on the cheek, for example, is the common way of greeting another person formally. It is considered as an expression of *aro'a* but not as a sign of emotional attachment, physical or sexual attraction or affection in Rarotonga. In fact, the public display of affection between couples involved in an intimate relationship is frowned upon. Couples showing affection in public, love scenes in movies and displayed underwear in shop windows are perceived with amusement and embarrassment by Rarotongan people. Mostly international visitors -- *papaā* couples -- walking arm in arm or kissing and touching in public are commented on with shaking heads and the phrase "Do they not have a home?"

Physical affection, such as hugging and cuddling, is a common feature of women's and older people's behaviour towards babies and young children as well as in close relationships between women of the same age group. Leaning on, touching or holding hands among women can often be observed particularly in difficult or stressful situations. It marks closeness, reassurance and provides unspoken support. Such kind of physical affection is hardly seen in daily interactions among couples. Rather joking and teasing is used as a substitute for the absence of visible physical affection in romantic partner relationships.

I never saw Papa Tere and Mama Vara hugging or kissing each other, however, the closeness of their relationship was obvious. When I came home in the afternoon, I often found both of them sitting at the veranda or under the trees talking and laughing. Before and after her trip to New Zealand, Mama Vara often mentioned that her trips alone, without Papa Tere, are good for him because he can use the time to relax from her 'bossy' attitude. Papa Tere usually agreed and responded with played seriousness: "Yes, then nobody is around telling me what to do". These conversations always ended in loud laughter while both looked into each other's eyes. When Mama Vara was away, Papa Tere always expressed that he missed her by saying "It is time for Mama Vara to come home so that we can have a proper meal".

Papa Tere often showed his affection for Mama Vara through actions. For example, if Mama Vara was baking and was missing an ingredient, he went to town to buy it. He was the main cook during the week and especially on Sundays he prepared the lunch while Mama Vara and myself were in church. He also used the motorbike so that Mama Vara could use the car which was more convenient, but also protected her from the dogs who do not shy away from attacking people on their motorbikes particularly during dawn and night hours.

In Rarotonga, emotions and feelings are not manifested and demonstrated through what someone says but through what someone does out of *aro'a* and gestures, actions and behaviour are seen as expressions of *aro'a*. Emotions and feelings are felt by Rarotongan people but rarely voiced. It is believed that speaking about emotions and feelings does not convey reliable information about what one really thinks and feels. In intimate partner relationships *aro'a* is expressed by taking the time to do things together, talk with each other, cooperation on tasks and doing things to make life easier for the other party. I only recognised verbal expressions of affection from men towards women when they were

drunk. Then, men described how amazing and beautiful a woman is physically and character wise. The latter one was often underlined by descriptions of what a woman does for her family and the wider community. Usually women listened for a while, pleased and embarrassed at the same time, before they tried to shut the men up which usually just led to more compliments.

Love scenes in Western movies are viewed with laughter accompanied by dirty jokes. One day I was invited by friends to go to the cinema to watch a so-called 'girl's movie'. The biggest room at the cinema was nearly full with men and women of all age groups. As soon as the film started it was obvious that the movie would include a lot of sexual jokes in words and pictures. Contrary to my experiences in European cinemas, in Rarotonga it was never quiet, and nobody complained. During the whole duration of the movie, the cinema was full of laughter and whistles. Erotic scenes and sexual language were loudly commented on. One dirty joke followed the next and it seemed like a competition among the audience to make the best joke.

There was only one shop on the island specialized in selling erotic clothes for women such as underwear, elegant stockings and nightwear. One day I was in the car with two women around 45-years of age. When we passed the lingerie shop windows, one circled her upper body, said "sexy" and started giggling. The second joined immediately. After a while she commented "I am not sure if they make any money because this is not for us -- the locals -- neither our size nor our style". Several weeks later when I passed the lingerie shop, a 'for sale' sign was placed at the window.

Aro'a, food and care

One of the most visible signs of *aro'a* in the Rarotongan community is one's concern for another person's physical and emotional well-being which is most obviously

expressed through sharing, providing and the gifting of food (see also Alexeyeff, 2004; Ta'irea, 2003; Jonassen, 2003; Berno, 1999). Children and guests are often targets of these care efforts, as I experienced on my own when my host parents put a lot of efforts into the task that I gain weight. During my whole trip, Mama Vara commented frequently on my figure by expressing concerns about what my partner would think about them if I would return home so slim. To her relief, while in Rarotonga, I gained weight. Within the local community, Mama Vara's and Papa Tere's success of taking good care of me has been credited to their social prowess and reputation as good people. A woman expressed that on my last day when she gave me a whole bunch of bananas and taro to take home accompanied by the words "This is for your hosts because they looked well after you".

The care efforts articulated through the offering and sharing of food in Rarotonga is, however, not limited to children and guests. Indeed, it is part of the much wider socio-cultural emphasis on relationships which, especially for women, is an internalized and unquestioned part of everyday life. Mama Vara, for example, every Sunday before we had our lunch, brought our neighbour, an elderly woman who lives alone, a plate of food. When I asked her why she did this she looked surprised and said: "She needs something to eat. It's her share and I also feel sorry for her". In the same way as Mama Vara's care efforts towards me, bringing food to her neighbor is an expression of *aro'a*.

Anthropologists and other scholars highlight the importance of food and its social context in Pacific Island societies (Alexeyeff, 2004; Ta'irea, 2003; Counihan, 1999; Pollock, 1992). The production and exchange of food permeates nearly all aspects of life. Loaded with values, emotions and feelings, food and its surrounding social practices place itself at the centre of the intimate lives of Rarotongan people. It creates and maintains social relationships and conveys behavioural rules, norms and attitudes and therefore moralities. In short, food in Rarotonga has a moral connotation insofar as it is a symbol

demonstrating *aro'a* as one woman considered: “You know here [in Rarotonga] we welcome people with food. Food means comforting, welcoming, and love. It means *aro'a*.”

Sharing, and providing food are also part of the deep attention Rarotongan people pay towards giving (see Crocombe & Holmes, 2014a; Horan, 2012; Alexeyeff, 2004; Ta'irea, 2003; Jonassen, 2003). Food gifts are offered during all social events, functions, presentations and family gatherings. I never attended a meeting where it was different. The size of the event and the topic of the event did not change the fact that there was always a broad variety and amount of food. It is also important that people shared the remaining food after all participants were satiated. In order to be a good host, one needs to provide food beyond what is consumed. This demonstrates abundance, generosity and care for those who participated in the event. Several women explained that the quality of a feast is measured at the amount of food and that it is important that there is enough food for people also to take home.

The term *aro'a* also means a gift or present, for example, ‘I give, forgive or welcome you with a gift’. One way of manifesting *aro'a* (love) is to give a gift (*aro'a*) (Alexeyeff, 2004). The offering of food is an expression of particularly women's *aro'a* towards their families and the wider community and a demonstration of good female moralities. Therefore, it is not surprisingly that I was often told the phrase: “You can have a wonderful feast but the reputation of a feast is destroyed if you don't provide enough food for your guests there to eat and to take home.”

The importance of this statement is also mirrored in a conversation I had with a friend one day after we attended a wedding. The first thing she spoke about was the food that was provided for the guests. “The food was really nice” she said, followed by a long explanation about the local specialties on the buffet, the company and the chef who

cooked the food and the male family member who prepared the pig before she eventually shortly addressed the couple and the celebration in general.²⁹

A similar importance is placed on the preparation of food for an event. Women are expected to engage in food preparations for a community or family event. The preparations are usually not done by women on their own, but rather women of all age groups come together. In addition to getting the work done, the women bond through the sharing of the food preparation. I always had the impression that the preparations are seen as an event before the event. Women are relaxed, they laugh and talk. The topics range from talking about neighbours and what happened in the neighbourhood to what was written in the newspaper about politicians. The coming together of women for food preparations is the best place to share the latest news and gossip. It is often the starting point of the so-called 'coconut wireless' through which information are distributed among the whole community.

The allocation of the specific tasks during the food preparations lies usually with the oldest woman who assigns the tasks among the women depending on their age and skills. Commonly, young women do the hard work such as mixing the ingredients of a meal in big pots, women of 30 till 50 years cut the vegetables and the meat and the older women are responsible for the taste. Women who attend such preparations but do not contribute to the work are looked upon badly, as I witnessed on my own.

The day after I arrived for the second part of my fieldwork trip, I was asked if I could help with the food preparations for a community event. When I arrived at nearly 80-year old Aunty Va'ine's house, another woman who was a bit older than me had

²⁹ In the past pork was only served on special occasions. Today, pieces of pork are readily available in local shops and restaurants. However, the slaughter of a home-grown pig is still reserved for special feasts such as weddings, 21st birthdays, haircutting rituals etc. (see Ta'irea, 2003; Marshall, 1971).

already started cutting the ingredients for a chicken curry. I joined the woman and we chatted while cutting vegetables. She told me that she took a day off from work to help with the preparations for this event. When we finished the cutting, a man around 45 years old and two younger women around 20 years old arrived. Aunty Va'ine, instructed the man to prepare the oven and to mix the big bowl of chicken pieces while she added the spices. Afterwards, the two young women were instructed to spread the chicken mix over the four pots. One of the younger women directly started to distribute the ingredients in the pots as instructed by Aunty Va'ine while the other one was sitting apart from us playing with her mobile phone. While I was unable to understand the conversation between the three women at this point because they had switched to Cook Islands Māori, I recognized the biting tone in their voices and the angry glances in the young woman's direction. She was not contributing to the work that needed to be done and, although she was not reprimanded, the women present did not approve of her actions, as they contradict with local moral values and understandings of *aro 'a*.

Another important demonstration of *aro 'a* is manifested in the care that family members offer to a person who is ill or hospitalized (see also Jonassen, 2003). At least one family member, usually a woman, stays with the person overnight and during the day other relatives visit and bring food. After I had been in Rarotonga for several weeks, Aunty Va'ine became seriously sick. After one week in bed at home, the doctor decided that it might be best to bring her to the hospital. On this day when I was on my way home in the evening, Tekura called and told me what has happened asking if I would like to accompany her on a visit. When we arrived at the hospital, another woman who was sitting on Aunty Va'ine's bed shortly explained her condition and left with the words "I will be back tomorrow morning". I took her seat and Aunty Va'ine took my hand before she fell asleep again. For a while, Tekura was also sitting close to her, holding her other

hand and quietly chatting with me before she stood up to make the arrangements for me to stay overnight. After Tekura left, Aunty Va'ine woke up; she smiled, opened the drawer on her bedside table and asked "Are you hungry?" Recognising my surprised facial expression, she explained "I had a lot of visitors today. They brought plenty of food. I am never able to eat all of that on my own". Her invitation to share the food with me was also an expression of her *aro 'a* for me.

Sending or taking food when visiting relatives overseas is another tangible demonstration of *aro 'a* (Alexeyeff, 2004). It was the week before my friend Erii was flying to Auckland when our conversations mostly circulated around her trip -- what she would do in Auckland, with whom and when as well as her preparations for the trip, mainly the organization of what she has to take because her sister has asked her to bring coconuts and taro. The point she was struggling with was if she should take the taro raw or cooked. We discussed advantages such as that the preparation time for her fulltime working sister would be minimized and disadvantages such as that Erii would have to do the cooking while she was already stressed and overloaded with the preparations for her trip. At the end I proposed a compromise: cook half of it and take the other half raw. While Erii was thinking about my proposal (which she later put into practice), I asked "Is there no possibility to buy taro in Auckland?" My friends answer came fast and without hesitation "Oh yes, heaps, but my sister says it has no taste".

For Erii in particular and other Rarotongans in general, the focus of gift giving expressed though providing and sharing of food is not valued just because of its economic importance, rather it is through its demonstration of *aro 'a*. Home grown taro as Erri's sister expressed has a special taste, a taste of home, a taste of belonging, intimacy and *aro 'a*. An intimate context which the taro available in New Zealand misses and this is why the taro Erii's sister can buy in New Zealand "has no taste". Providing her sister with

home grown products is Erri's way of showing *aro'a* for her sister. Providing and sharing food are tools used by Rarotongan people to express nurturance, responsibility, respect and affection towards others. A person who cares for another person, who provides and shares food, gives a gift which, in turn, strengthens, develops and maintains social and family relationships (see Horan, 2017 & 2012; Alexeyeff, 2004; Ta'irea, 2003; Graves & Graves, 1978). In other words, giving a gift through food, whether it be by taking care of another person or contributing to a feast (either through providing food or through participation in preparations) and sharing food with others (especially family members and guests) within daily situations shows the willingness of a person to develop and uphold a relationship as well as how much effort someone is willing to put into a relationship. Not looking after another person, nor sharing or providing food as well as not engaging in food preparations for community or family events, on the contrary, mark the refusal of a relationship which, in turn, reflect badly on the character of the individual and their family.

Aro'a, women and family

In Rarotonga, happy and harmonious relationships, especially between family members, are desired. Family members are expected to treat each other in a respectful way, to avoid conflicts and to demonstrate 'good' moralities. *Aro'a* and the encapsulated values are the guiding principles behind a person's actions and behaviour. My observations suggest that those primarily responsible for demonstrating *aro'a* by nurturing family relationships are women. This is also mirrored in the responses I received when I asked young women "What makes for you a 'good' Cook Islands woman?" 32-year old Mere, for example, stated:

She is strong. She is independent. Um, she is graceful. She is educated. She is a mother and when I say mother I mean a real mother, uh, one who

looks after her children! She is a carer. She is a provider. She stands up for others. She takes on the responsibility to look out for her own family and others.

24-year old Apii commented:

To make a 'good' Cook Islands woman, I think you have to be strong but respectful, in a respectful way. Um, you have to speak your own opinions and, um, I think as a woman you have to value family above anything else.

27-year old Maara elaborates:

For us women our family, family is literally our main concern. We work hard to keep our families together, um, either at work or at home or in the community. Um, we probably get a bit defensive if people start, you know, saying bad things about our family. You know, everyone is above us, our first goal is taking care of or just making sure everyone is ok. You know, we women here tend to take a lot on and not really kind of think about ourselves.

29-year old Ina notes:

Obviously our culture and our religion comes into play in this as well and traditions as well. Um, generally it has been that woman's place it had been in home, um, cooking and nurturing and caring for our families.

The role of women in establishing and maintaining harmonious and happy relationships is inextricably intertwined with local understandings of women, their bodies and femininity. Young women have to be constantly aware that they are held responsible for the reputation and honour of their family (Alexeyeff, 2009a, 2009b). Young women who do not practice *aro'a* provoke unease among parents because a daughter's behaviour reflects foremost on her parents, particularly her father's ability to lead the family, before the moralities of the whole family are questioned. Through the incorporation and embodiment of *aro'a* a young woman can earn a good reputation and in doing so she honours her family by contributing to their social reputation. Practicing *aro'a* is a demonstration of 'good' female moralities but *aro'a* is also a value integrated in young

women's decision-making processes and mirrored in the strategies young women use to negotiate and manage social life and relationships (see Chapter Three to Six).

Aro'a and respect

Besides love, compassion, sharing, giving, helping, hospitality and care, respect has been mentioned above all by young women as the most proper demonstration of *aro 'a* for their parents, other family members and the wider community. The importance placed on respect, from pre-Christian times until today, in the Cook Islands has been mentioned by several scholars (Siikala, 1991; Gilson, 1980; Gill, 1979a [1892]; Baddeley, 1978; Buck, 1971a [1934], 1971b [1932] & 1971c [1932]; Beaglehole, 1957 & 1944). In the past, respect has been shown most obviously towards gods, chiefs and aged persons. While gods and chiefs have not been mentioned by young Rarotongan women, the latter one -- respect towards the elderly -- is still applicable today, as 23-year old Inano explains:

I can do my own thing, you know, but at the same time, um, it's just that respect that you have for your elders and ... how do I explain it? So, for myself, I like that I can do my own thing but at the same time I keep them in mind, to have respect, you know. You have to help out the family, the community, the people, um, the youth especially and our elderly as well. It all comes down to respect.

While having respect for the elderly, their skills, experience and knowledge is visible in many situations and contexts in daily life, the majority of young women mentioned respect as a feature of their relationships with family members in general. For 24-year old Teina:

Respect is already there [in your immediate family], automatically there, you don't have to earn it. I mean you do in a certain sense but not in, um, like with extended [family members] I think you have to earn it sort of thing. Uh, there is respect there but, um, the way I see it you have to earn it from them more whereas in your immediate [family] respect is there immediately, it's in the love you have for each other.

Considering the close connection between love and respect, it is not surprisingly that young women's most important demonstration of respect is directed towards their family particularly their parents, as 23-year old Puretu explains:

I do have great respect for them, very high respect for them, um, and my siblings as well. Um, so I think probably respect is the main thing that will keep us together basically and communication as well. So, my parents would always want to know, um, like 'where are you going?' So, to have them to always worry about us, um, every day ... so, um, if we were to go somewhere we would like to inform them like 'this is where I am going, who I met' and they are like 'ok yeah' and they are like 'well as long we know where you're going, so, um, if, in case something happens then, you know, we know where you are'. That's how I show respect towards, um, our parents and also when they tell us to do something we do it! Or when they ask us of an, I mean an opinion about something we give an opinion, if we disagree to doing a particular chore and they would be like 'oh, why don't you want to do it?' And then when you give them a valued reason of, um, not doing it then they will just say 'ah ok, then look leave it then, give it a few more minutes, then you can do the chore'. So, that's how we were raised, um, and another thing in terms of school. My parents were always looking after me to go to school. It's a must for us to go, but especially for me as a girl. Uh, that are just examples but I mean that's how we respect our parents, the decisions our parents have made. If they tell us to do something we will do it.

The scope and significance of parents in regard to young women's decision-making processes will be discussed at greater length in the following chapters. But what can be said here is that respect towards parents, in the sense young women express it, can only be understood within the broad concept of *aro 'a*. As stated above, the intrinsic values encapsulated within *aro 'a*, including respect, are shown and embodied through a person's behaviour and actions towards other people rather than through verbal expression of feelings and praise. For this reason, actions and behaviour mirroring compliance with family's and society's perceptions of and expectations on a 'good' woman are perceived as the best demonstration of young women's respect and, therefore *aro 'a*, for their family members.

Aro‘a and gender specific roles

The family holds a key position with regard to the morality of its members. Senior family members, particularly women, are assumed to have not only a moral obligation to convey *aro‘a*, but they are also expected to pass these values, their appropriate context specific expressions and associated behaviour to younger family members. They are also responsible for ensuring the compliance with these norms and values especially of girls and young women. Doing this is considered to be an act out of *aro‘a* for the girls and young women as well as an act of responsibility to the whole family.

Sex and gender differentiation does not appear particularly relevant in the early years of a child’s life and compliant behaviour is not expected of a child. However, the biological sex of a baby strongly influences parental and community actions and behaviour in relation to the child and the handling of the *‘enua* (placenta and foetal membrane). When a child has been born the *‘enua* is secured and brought home if a woman gave birth overseas. The *‘enua* is considered highly sacred and buried in the soil of family land during a formal ritual ceremony (Savage, 2012).³⁰ Since ancient days, on top of the *‘enua* of a male child a coconut tree is planted or if the family wanted their son to become a successful fisherman the *‘enua* has been thrown into the sea. Over a female

³⁰ The burying practice is connected to Rarotongan people’s cosmological perception that their ancestors and spirits live in the ground of their family land. Burying the *‘enua* is a way for the living members of a family to give back to their ancestors. The practice of burying the *‘enua* also highlights the deep interconnectedness between the living and the dead members of a family. Not only the approval and support of the living family members seems important to Rarotongan people but also from the ancestors symbolized through the growing plant above the *‘enua*. Growing of the plant mirrors the ancestors support and acceptance of the newborn to the family. It is believed that if the plant does not grow the ancestors and spirits are angry and disapproving of the child. This in turn affects the health and future of a child negatively. Commonly, the *‘enua* is buried on a part of the family land which is important to the parents and which they want to also become important to their child or the *‘enua* is buried on a piece of family land which should later belong to the child (see also Jolly, 2007). A friend told me that several years ago she was interested to find out where the borders of her land really are. One of the borders reached into what she had always considered her neighbor’s land. A tree was planted on what she now knew was her land and she asked her neighbor to remove the tree. The neighbor begged her to leave the tree where it is because the *‘enua* of one of his children is buried underneath the tree. A removal of the tree is believed to affect a child negatively. Trying to avoid misfortune for his child, my friend’s neighbour dug a wide area surrounding the tree deep into the soil to remove the tree and the *‘enua* without damage, leaving a big hole behind.

child's 'enua, a flower shrub usually that of a *tiare maori* is planted in the soil (Mason, 2018, p. 22).³¹

After a child is born the parents announce whether it is a boy or a girl. They choose a name whereby some names are sex specific whereas others are unsexed. The child's biological sex determines the nature of presents parents receive from relatives and friends after childbirth as well as the child's physical appearance, the kind and colour of clothes and the toys provided. Girls are dressed in bright colour skirts and boys in covered colour shorts and shirts. From early on, this mirrors the ideal that girls stay in clean environments whereas boys run around, play in the dirt and roll on the grass. Girls are expected to play with dolls and boys with toy cars. At this stage in a child's life, people watch with amusement and make jokes if a girl prefers to play with toy cars and neglects dolls. The same applies if a girl is rebellious and cheeky, demanding a great proportion of attention which is typically identified with boyish behaviour.

School uniforms are gender specific; girls wear skirts and boys wear trousers. Girls usually have long hair and boys have short hair. Young boys and girls play the same games together and they are neutrally referred to as *tamariki*. With increasing age, they are referred to as *tamaine* (girl, female child) or *tamaroa* (boy, male child). Both girls and boys start to distance themselves from the opposite sex by engaging in circles of the same sex. Duties also become more gender differentiated. Boys are encouraged to help their fathers with the outside work and repairs around the house whereas girls are supposed to stay inside and are instructed by the female family members' in-house chores, cooking

³¹ The *tiare maori* is considered the most prestigious flower in the Cook Islands and the only flower called *maori*. *Maori* in the Cook Islands language means indigenous and *tiare* is the emic term for flower. Brought to the Cook Islands by the first settler as a memory of their original Polynesian homeland 'Ava'iki and the left behind family members, the *tiare maori* still remains a link to the past for Cook Island people today. Elegant and simple, the *tiare maori* is a symbol for respect and love. 'Ei's made from nearly-open *tiare maori* are given at weddings, funerals, graduations and welcoming ceremonies. "[T]he buds, flowers and leaves of this tree are [also] used in traditional medicine, especially for curing migraines, headaches, eczema and sinusitis" (Mason, 2018, p. 22).

and how to take care of their family members. The differences in duties and therefore spaces results from the Christian ideal that women engage in clean work inside the house and within the community, and men undertake the dirty work outside the house and in the gardens. In practice, these gender specific role ascriptions are not rigid and particularly nowadays women can be seen raking the rubbish or mowing the lawn. Fulfilling these tasks are a demonstration of *aro'a* towards family members and therefore an expected part of being a 'good' young woman, as 27-year old Maara explains:

As a woman in the Cook Islands your role is doing certain things. If you are at home, you are expected to do certain tasks and it's perceived as a woman's task such as, you know, washing dishes, folding cloths or washing, keeping the house clean. That's a woman's job. It's not a man's job. So, at my age we are supposed to being more of a driver in the family, more, um, this kind of keeping families together. So, for me, I work hard, I work really really hard. Being the eldest of the family I have to look out for my younger ones and regardless of what my activities are in the day I still have to take care of my parents and my siblings.

This perspective has also been mirrored in young women's statements when I asked them if they experienced a difference between their and their brother's upbringing. Most young women indicated that they did not experience any differences or that their parents tried not to convey any gender differences. However, as our conversation progressed, the majority of young women elaborated on their response indicating that there were differences, as 23-year old Kaua outlines:

Um, no, not really. Um, well, maybe the chores. There is a different way we were brought up. So, we had to, we were taught how to do housework, so we cooked the food and basically do what women, well they said what women are supposed to do. Like, I mean they said 'oh like women they have, they have to learn how to cook, they have to learn how to do house chores', you know, women do this, women have to do that, women clean the dishes. The men don't have to do that. The men [sic] do the outside work and the women do the inside work.

18-year old Vai adds:

So, everything you do outside like caring heavy stuff, climbing coconut trees, getting food, that's the man's job. A woman's job would just be sitting home, uh, you know, like housewives and they, um, they get food ready for the husband and everything. They clean the house and all that stuff.

Adolescent girls take on a great part of the household work which leaves some of them little to no time for themselves. They are expected to come home directly after school to start washing, cleaning and cooking before their parents come home from work. The eldest daughter usually organises most parts of the household work on her own, while also taking care of her younger siblings. Her position in the family is ambiguous. She is doing the work, she takes on the responsibility of an adult woman and is expected to function as a role model for her younger siblings, but she is still treated as a child who has to follow older family members' orders and is punished for her wrongdoings. Young women sometimes mentioned that their brothers did not have to do as much housework nor did they have to take on these responsibilities for the family, although young women rarely complained about their workload.

Aro'a, clothes, sex and freedom

Additional to domesticity and the caring for family members, personal grooming and physical appearance are central normative ideals of femininity. Young Rarotongan women pay great attention to their physical appearance and personal grooming. In public, they present themselves always well styled, fashion conscious and self-confident. They wear formfitting long or short Island dresses or skirts mostly accompanied by flip-flops on their well-manicured feet. Long trousers are rare but occasionally shorts are worn. Mascara, lipstick and make-up are applied seldomly and unobtrusively. The hair of women is usually long and well groomed. Mostly the hair is pulled up in a tight bun or represents the whole pride of women when falling loose over their shoulders. Fingernails

are manicured and perfectly varnished. Earrings, necklaces and rings are popular body jewelry. During my conversation about clothing with 28-year old Mereani she explains:

Wearing pants during the day is an oddity like even make up are kind of odd here like even I've stopped wearing make up as much as I would have before [when I lived overseas] because it just looks so dressed up.

23-year old Kaua adds: "With outfits, with clothes that stuff they expect us to just look decent because we do know that we have just to look decently." 19-year old Mata highlights:

We are not allowed to wear bikinis in public. We can't do that. We can't walk around showing our body. Our bodies are *tapu*, you know, and you respect yourself and you respect your body even though it's hot. It is disrespectful to your elders. So, if I wore a bikini and another family would see me in a bikini, they would talk about me and then talk about my family.

Rarotongan people make jokes and comment heavily on female tourist's clothing. Extremely short shorts or skirts, belly free and deep neckline shirts as well as tourists wearing only a bikini top in town or a bikini on a beach are topics of constant criticism. On the country's entry card among entry requirements, clearing customs, safety and security tips, information for car driving, currency and banking as well as the available island communication technology, a section called dress is included. It is written:

Although the dress code is informal, we do ask that brief attire not be worn when visiting town, churches or villages. **Nude or topless sunbathing will cause offence.** (bold in original)

In Rarotonga, these expressions of modesty certainly have their roots in Christian teachings and principals. Indeed, the kind of clothing is thought to reflect a person's moral status and character. Immodest dresses such as bikinis and extremely short shorts indicate deviance from expected female ideals which lead consequently to transgressive behaviour. Wearing deviant clothing, especially by young women, is considered to be a display of *papaa* individuality. The display of individual character and strength is

appreciated and supported to a certain extent as long as the result contributes to the reputation of the whole family and the wider community. Individual achievements such as a university degree, a good job, a leading role in a non-governmental or religious organization as well as in a governmental department are seen as accomplishments not just of the individual but of the whole family. Thus, individual achievements influence a person's social status and the pressure to perform well in these tasks is high. Their actions are evaluated as fulfilling their moral responsibilities towards their family members and a demonstration of *aro'a*. Contrarily, deviant clothing including wearing a bikini, as Mata explained, is not considered an appropriate display of individuality and hence *aro'a*. Moreover, such a presentation of individuality has the potential to harm a family's reputation because as Kalissa Alexeyeff (2009b, p. 89) points out "daughters are seen as representatives of their family's moral image" (see also Alexeyeff, 2009a). For this reason, I decided not to go swimming and in public, I always wore knee long skirts and decent shirts. I did not want to risk my clothing causing damage to my own and more importantly to my hosts' reputation and moral image. This in turn would have damaged the relationship I had established with my hosts and their families beyond repair. Young women who do not comply with the socially required dress code are accused of neglecting their moral responsibilities towards their family and young women tend to follow the expected dress code especially during daytime when they perform their job and other daily activities. Complying with these ideals is an expression of *aro'a*.

The situation appears to be very different in bars and clubs at night. Young women wear make-up and are dressed in very short skirts or shorts, belly free and deep neckline shirts. In pre-Christian time, the night has been feared and thought of as full of ghosts. Nowadays, it seems that particularly for young women the night provides protection to do things which they would usually not do during daytime. This is not limited to their

change of dress code. Moreover, several young women highlighted that most of their casual sexual activities take place while clubbing and drinking at night. Non-governmental organisations such as Punanga Tauturu highlight and warn that the protection of the night also encourages men to take advantage of women.³² A high number of rapes take place during the night and most of them are not reported to police as women are ashamed to be accused that they provoked this sort of behaviour in men due to their dress code and behaviour.

However, except the beautiful colorful island dress and the length of the skirts during office hours, in private, I could hardly identify a big difference in clothing between New Zealand and Rarotongan women. Young women are aware of the relative freedom given to them in regard to clothing in comparison to other Pacific islands, as 24-year old Apii describes.

I think in the Cook Islands, women have more opportunities than other women in the Pacific. Well, I think we might have more freedom as well say for example our choice of clothes. Women in Fiji and Tonga usually cover up. They say it's culturally; it's disrespectful to embrace your body. But here in the Cook Islands we as women we're being a lot more free in terms of choosing what outfit you want to wear. [...] So, when I go to Tonga, I usually cover up (laugh). I usually wear long sleeves and t-shirts and as in here I like to dress pretty, keep up to date with the fashion in New Zealand and Australia. But girls in Tonga and Fiji probably don't have the same freedom as us here.

Admittedly, however, young women felt they have not had the same levels of freedom in comparison to their brothers during their upbringing, as Apii remembers:

³² Incorporated in 1994, the Cook Islands Women's Counselling Centre, Punanga Tauturu Inc., is a non-profit organisation based in Rarotonga dedicated to the elimination of abuse and violence against women and children in the Cook Islands. Punanga Tauturu's objectives include the empowerment of women through the provision of information and training programs on legal literacy and human rights, advocacy for a legal framework that recognises the rights of women and children as well as to provide a supportive environment for women to make decisions about themselves and to determine their future when they become victims/survivors of violence and sexual assaults (Punanga Tauturu, Facebook website, accessed 13/01/2021).

I think the boys had more freedom than I did. Growing up, girls are not really allowed to go out especially at night but boys they had more of that freedom. But going to sports and everything, my dad and my mom were really supportive but everything outside of sports or outside of church – it was hard. When I started school I wasn't really encouraged to do anything, all the bad stuff (laugh). All the fun stuff they used to say (laugh). I did go out a few times, um, once I started getting older. I think in my teens, I think sixteen, seventeen, I started going out. But that was only because my mom needed to come to my aunties' house which is just across the road. Yeah, that's how crazy it is. So, I just go there with my friends and then as soon as it finished I have to come back to my mom and then we will go back home. Yeah. When I used to be really young I just cried of it and my mom said 'When you get older there is heaps of time to go out'.

In line with all my interlocutors be they young or old, Apii indicates that the main difference between young women and their brother's upbringing is related to freedom. In Rarotonga, freedom has to be expressed within certain boundaries always considering the effects which one's doings might have on other people especially family members (see Jonassen, 2003). People are often unaware of the boundaries until they face them because within those boundaries, they are free to do whatever they want. The boundaries in which young women were allowed to express freedom during their upbringing were much tighter than those for young men, as 27-year old Maara experience exemplifies:

Uh, you know, when I went to school I worked solely on just satisfying, I mean satisfying my parents! Such as school, so, whatever they said I have to listen, so, I will do it. So, my upbringing was very reserved. It was very very restricted. You can't do this, you can't do that. Uh, you can go here but you have to be back or you have to be supervised. So, say in the day you are in school and after school you have after school activities such as either sports trainings or church Bible studies and then, um, you got to be back home. So, when you go to school you come straight home, be at home and then you can go to activities, if you didn't finish your chores at home than you can't go to that. But, um, there are things that you have to go to which is church or family functions. You have to go to that, but other than that you gonna go home. I wasn't even allowed to go to sleep overs. I wasn't allowed to go out, I had curfews. So, if I go there, um, say I will go to church functions or school functions but be at home by 6 o'clock because as girls you are not supposed to be outside. Only because we were girls! To them we can't defend for ourselves. It's just the thing like, you

know, we can't look after ourselves in a moral way. That is it! Even until now but you are a girl. Girls are not supposed to do that. Girls are not supposed to do this, uh, say, for example, wearing clothes. I wasn't allowed to wear shorts when I was young. So, even with sports I wasn't allowed to. I had to wear a dress. That's just and another thing it's just going out by yourself, you know, you weren't allowed to go out by yourself because you are a girl! Something might happen to you. During night, during day it wasn't allowed even when you go out with your friends just to go play down the road. You can't do that! You can do that if you are supervised, so, if mom and dad going to be there or an older brother or older cousin. Other than that, they won't let you go until someone they trust is with you. Only because you're a girl, girls can't defend themselves. Girls are supposed to be indoors to avoid, you know, things happening to them or like just make sure, you know, that their virtue is protected (laugh) like you weren't allowed to get pregnant until you reach the 21st birthday or even to meet anyone until you're 21. Girls are, um ... well it's like you have this prestigious jewel. You got to keep the jewel in a box. You only bring it out when you need to wear it. That's literally how we kind of felt in a way. When we go out somewhere we got to like sit there nicely and not doing anything. You only speak when you are spoken to or those kinds of things. It was very, very strict back then. If you don't listen sure there is your hiding there. But that's yeah (laugh). Having the freedom to do certain things it wasn't very easy.

24-year old Teina remembers:

So, with our, my upbringing, growing up my brother was able to go out and socialise with people whereas we weren't allowed and my father said it is because we're girls. We go out, then get pregnant. That's what he awaits like that's how he saw it. Yeah, when we grew up the boys were able to go out and have fun but not the girls. I think it was something that we grow up with and got used to but, um, we just never understood like why, why, why we are staying at home and they could go and do anything. I just never understood. When I was a bit older like yeah, ok, although they let us do things like go out but to a certain time we had to be at home and this all because we are women. Men don't have these problems because they don't bring it home sort of thing. But it's us, the girls, we get pregnant, you know, we come home pregnant.

23-year old Inano came to this conclusion:

I think it would be much easier being a guy I guess because, um, ... how do I explain it. So, yeah, they, you know, if for a girl ... you can't just, um, I mean you could, if you are a guy it would be much easier for you to just

go and do like anything. So, for us women we find it hard to, um, we worry about things like rape and all this, these kinds of things, um, but for men it's just, it's easier.

These depictions underline that in Rarotonga, girls and young women are constantly assessed in ways not experienced by boys and young men particularly in regard to the categories of work, responsibilities towards the family, education, representation of the body and comportment towards sexuality. Sex and its moral interpretations especially in regard to female sexuality were a central aspect of missionaries' teachings. Missionaries considered women as the morally weaker sex. Particularly young women's sexuality has been considered to be more dangerous and more suspect than men's sexuality and thus must be controlled. In contemporary daily life, jokes often disguise the seriousness of this matter. Especially older women I knew joked frequently with me. When they offered me a ride, for example, they asked 'Do you need a lift or are you waiting for your boyfriend?' In the car after I have explained what I had planned for the day and where I am going, they would tell me that they are going to see their boyfriends, but cannot tell me where they are going because I could tell their partners before bursting out in laughter. Nevertheless, in contemporary Rarotonga, female sexuality continues to be one of the most significant aspects of moral debates closely related to a family's moral reputation and honour.

A family's moral status depends to a great part on a young woman's behaviour towards others, their physical appearance and sexual reputation. A young woman's representation of her body, bodily purity and sexual restraint is a sign of 'good' family moralities. Young women are considered as 'good' and 'bad' based on whether they are publicly known to be sexually active or inactive. Unsurprisingly, young women especially below the age of 21 are not expected or encouraged to explore, express or enact their own sexuality wherefore young women hide their sexual feelings, desire and pleasure especially from

adults. Restraining and managing their own sexual desires means demonstrating and embodying *aro'a* for their families. Young women's awareness that they are responsible for their families' moral reputation places great pressure on young women to comply with their families' expectations to behave conform with socio-historical-cultural rules and norms of being a 'good' young Rarotongan woman (see also Tupuola, 2004 on young Samoan women). 24-year old Moana puts it in a nutshell:

It's tough being a young woman here. I think, um, if we are talking it parents wise or, um, actually it is the whole community, I think as a woman you're criticized a lot more I reckon as man in the Cook Islands because ... I don't know ... I think it's just how we grow up. People here can be critical about everything, not just the parents (laugh). So, I think our parents is just the same as people were like where you work or how much you earn I think in general the people here are just critical, you know. So, being a woman in general is like, yeah, tough, not tough, but like there are challenges, you know, especially here. I guess one of the challenges is, like, to look good but in a decent way, to have a good education, a good job, earn money, have a nice family on our own but still taking care of our parents and siblings. Yeah, I think there are more expectations for females over here. Yeah, and I think for the males, a man, they just have to be a good provider. That's it! From my perspective, um, for a woman I think you drop everything for your family. I mean you're 100% dedicated to the family; you do not have a life on your own. But the male just has to provide and still goes on with normal life.

Conclusion

What I presented in this chapter is what has been described by people at the time of my fieldwork as the ideal characteristics and virtues of a 'good' Rarotongan woman. Drawing on Cheryl Mattingly (2014), Saba Mahmood (2005) and Joel Robbins (2018), I outlined how young women have been and are understood in relation to these ideals as well as how young Rarotongan women perceive these ideals and understand themselves in relation to these ideals. In Rarotonga, individuals, particularly women, are expected to embody *aro'a* in daily life. As I have shown, young women's demonstration of *aro'a* is displayed through practices in relation towards other people especially by following the

expectations family members and the wider community have for them. In this sense, *aro 'a* is about adjusting oneself, caring for others and in doing so fostering and maintaining social and family relationships. *Aro 'a* is articulated in young women's social interactions and designates their social competence. Women who are rarely involved with others, are too individualistic, not able to maintain and build relationships and who do not comply with socio-historical-cultural rules and norms of gender and age specific norm conforming behaviour are understood as not showing *aro 'a* and therefore lacking 'good' female moralities and virtues. This places young women under great pressure. Being seen and feeling like a 'good' Rarotongan woman by being able to balance and negotiate their desires and social approval in an appropriate way on a daily basis and therefore showing *aro 'a* is of main importance for young women's moral projects of becoming and self-formation in their strive to live a moral life. Indeed, young women constantly negotiate between their desires and the responsibilities they have towards their family members in a way not known to young men. In this sense, what is considered and perceived as appropriate or 'good' by young women and others is both gender specific and relational.

Chapter Three

Negotiating family membership

In Rarotonga, social and foremost family relationships provide the core and means to live a moral life whereby, as I have shown in the last chapter, the main *modus operandi* within these relationships is *aro'a*. Young Rarotongan women's thoughts, decisions, actions and, hence, their moral work seems to have far reaching influences on their own subjectivities and family relationships provoking not only a critical examination of one's own life and character as Cheryl Mattingly (2014) argues, but, as I will show, also the life and character of other family members. Evaluating and making accounts of others and their own character and actions is a moral project young Rarotongan women constantly engage in, particularly about their family members. They evaluate not only who these family members are in terms of their status but more important if they fulfil the expectations young women have for the role they hold as mother, father, sibling, grandparent etc. Taking morality seriously, as several anthropologists (see Mattingly, 2014; Robbins, 2013; Laidlaw, 2014; Lambek, 2010b; Read, 1955) have pointed out, does not inherently mean that people are good; moreover, it means that people are evaluative of their own actions and the actions of others. As I will demonstrate throughout this thesis, family relationships strongly influence young women's actions, behaviour and the choices they make in a particular context and thus if a person is considered a family member and which kind of influence a 'family member' has in a young woman's life depends to a great part on young women's evaluations of whether these relationships with family members feel right.

Unaisi Nabobo-Baba (2006, p. 72), Christina Toren and Simonne Pauwels (2015, p. 1) point out that Pacific Island people understand kinship as "knowledge that counts".

Anthropologists and other scholars working in the Pacific underline this statement, arguing that kinship relations have been considered to be the most central relationships in Pacific societies (see Bamford, 2004; Leach, 2003; Stasch, 2003; Jones, Herda and Suaalii, 2000; Marshall and Caughey, 1989; Jolly and Macintyre, 1989; Marshall, 1981; Ortner, 1981). Jane Horan (2012, p. 6) argues that “[k]inship and the maintenance of kinship relations and networks are fundamental to the way Cook Islanders exist in the world and see the world”. This perspective has been supported by young Rarotongan women when I asked at the end of all conversations “out of all the different topics we discussed, what is of main importance to you and from your point of view to other young women”? The answers came straight, without hesitation and always pointing in the same direction as the following three statements summarise:

Family! Our most important thing here for us Cook Islander, I mean for me and I would say for other ladies as well is their family. (Makai, 34-year old woman)

The main important thing to me would be my family and the relationship I have with my family. Uh, anything after that, it will come after. (Puretu, 23-year old woman)

They [my family members] play a really important role in my life because if it wasn't for them I, I really wouldn't be who I am today. (Inano, 23-year old woman)

But what constitutes family in Rarotonga and who is included? Taira Rere (1976, p. 79) argues that in the Cook Islands people who live together at one place, including boarders, are considered as ‘family’. ‘Family’ goes beyond those related through kinship and is better defined as ‘household’. A family or household often will include a father, mother, their children, and other family members like grandparents, cousins, nephews, uncles, aunts or a ‘feeding child’ (*tamaiti angai*) (Ama, 2003, p. 119).³³ Davina Hosking (2007,

³³ A ‘feeding child’ is an adopted child whom one feeds and nurtures, usually a close relative but not necessarily (Ama, 2003, p. 119).

p. 76) describes the average Cook Islands' family as a unique unit because of the fact that a family is not reduced to a nuclear family but instead combines the immediate family, the extended family, neighbours and family friends "whether they are blood related or not". My interlocutors support Hosking's statement, but they highlight that who is included in their family and deserves the title 'family member' depends on the character of the person involved and the effort and sacrifices they are willing to make for the family, not on a biological connection. In some cases, blood family members are not considered 'family' whereas a friend or a teacher is considered 'family' because these persons fulfill the social and moral characteristics young women assign to relationships with family members. A partner or husband is also not considered family by young women immediately when a relationship starts but as someone who has the potential to become a part of it if he demonstrates a 'good' character. In short, the emic concept of family in Rarotonga is not created through blood or marriage but through active, supportive relationships.

Family is not something a person is simply born with and which remains forever unchanged. Family is a creation born from a variety of relationships which are generated, changed, transformed and negotiated throughout life as people participate in activities, create and maintain affiliations, express emotions and feelings as well as behave appropriately or inappropriately according to specific locally defined and expected social and moral characteristics which people show in family relationships, and which may include but are not exclusively blood relatives. Indeed, structures of family and kin relationships are shifting and temporal and, relations to blood relatives are only one basis on which indigenous family relations can rest, but it is by no means the only one, as 32-year old Mere puts it:

See close friends can be family. ... Because my friends are a huge part of my family. If anything they put in more family to me than my actual family. ... And I don't think you necessarily have to be related by blood to be family. It's the person; it's the people and the relationship you have with them that makes up this group.

In 1972, David Schneider (2004 [1972], p. 271) proclaimed “[k]inship”, like totemism, the matrilineal complex, and matriarchy, is a non-subject, since it does not exist in any culture known to man”. With these words, he questions the at that time in anthropology dominant concept of kinship and criticizes the analytical distinction between biological and social kinship which according to Schneider, as the category kinship itself, has its origins in European and American perceptions about biological reproduction (Schneider, 1984). In other cultures, this postulated biological bond does not mirror what anthropologists have typically described as kinship relationships. In his pioneering study on American kinship, Schneider (1980 [1968]) focused on the particular features defining a person as a relative. Schneider (1980 [1968]) examined American kinship as a symbolic system in which sexual relations and biological connections are meaningful symbols for social relationships. However, every society has different types of social and emotional feelings of connectedness, and biological relationships are only one part of it. In this sense, Janet Carsten (2000, p. 4) suggests the analytical category “relatedness” in opposition to or as a broader framework of kinship signaling openness to indigenous ideas of being related. The category relatedness grasps the understanding of family in Rarotongan context because it also includes people who are not connected via blood, birth or genetics but have a close emotional relation with each other.

Relatedness is central to social life and interlinks biological and social terms. Relatedness denotes dynamic, variable and discursive processes including different meanings, connections and levels which are constituted on a daily basis within specific socio-historical-cultural contexts (Carsten, 2000, p. 16, 23, 26). Indeed, “relatedness is

continuously ‘under construction’ through precisely these kinds of everyday acts” (Carsten, 2000, p. 18; see also Bodenhorn, 2000). In Rarotonga, what is considered and described as relatedness and how relatedness is lived, experienced and conceptualized is revealed through local practices and ideas about relationships which can only be understood within broader socio-historical-cultural and daily life contexts. This also includes the limits of connectedness. Jeanette Edwards and Marilyn Strathern (2000, p. 157) emphasised in their discussion of “counting and discounting connections” based on the example of northern English families that reckoning of kinship relations can theoretically be extended endlessly, in practice “[l]imits are set by how far one wishes to claim - or own, or own up to - such connections” (Edward and Strathern, 2000, p. 159).

Kopu Tangata

When I asked older women what they understood under the term ‘family,’ they often answered “we are all family here”. Some of them used the indigenous term *kopu tangata* interchangeably with the term ‘family’. Denoting the extended family, relatives or kinsmen, *kopu tangata* is conceived as a group of people who share common *toto* (blood) and can be literally translated as ‘people of the same belly’ (Savage, 2012 [1962]; Crocombe & Holmes, 2014b). According to Josephine Baddeley (1978, p. 138), the use of *kopu tangata* expresses biological relationships:

As an ego-orientated category, a person’s kōpū tangata are all those people with whom he shares any common kinsman. As an ancestor-oriented category, all people who consider themselves to be descent from a single common ancestor are one kōpū tangata which is identified by the name of the apical ancestor. People known as kōpū tangata are thought of as having originated from the same kōpū.

Kopu means ‘family’ but also ‘stomach’ or ‘belly’. Figuratively used it denotes the womb.³⁴ Depending on the context it also refers to a repository for food, indicates a state of pregnancy or “refers to the place where the unborn child is carried” (Baddeley, 1978, p. 138; Savage, 2012 [1962], p. 116). While people who share common *toto* (blood) are per definition part of the *kopu tangata*, it becomes particularly apparent that young women question this technical aspect of the definition of *kopu tangata* in their descriptions of family as not sufficient enough alone, as 29-year old Ina explains:

I would define family as, um, obviously you have your parents and your siblings and then you have your cousins. Uh, family over here is ... it is quite, you know, quite big. We have also our friends as well. They mean family as well. Um, you know your extended family and your family so you second and third, fourth cousins, your nieces and nephews they’re all family as well because we are quite small communities. Yeah, it’s nearly everyone ... But real family are the people who raised you or someone who is been a constant in your life. Even if they aren’t blood related that’s your mom’s really, really good friend, you know, who has come around quite frequently since you were really, really small.

23-year old Kaua underlines Ina’s statement:

Oh! I consider, um, those close to me not just by blood. ... I would consider friends, close friends as family. Uh, I would also say my teachers who helped me along the way I would consider them as family. People who always been there.

Both Ina and Kaua suggest that people can be part of the *kopu tangata* but that does not mean that young women are emotionally attached to these persons and therefore consider them as their ‘real’ family. ‘Real’ family is constituted of people with whom young women grew up in close spatial and emotional proximity who provide loyalty, support and love as 24-year old Teina indicates:

I think family means, is, um, people who were there with you from the beginning sort of to the end. Um, people whose be there for you during a

³⁴ In medical contexts Rarotongans distinguish between *kopu* (stomach) and *vairanga tamariki* (womb) (Crocombe & Holmes, 2014b, p. 345).

tough time and, um, a family for me, family means, um, people, it's being surrounded by people, ah, you love sort of thing, yeah.

24-year old Moana refers to another often mentioned characteristic when she described what family means to her:

Uh, family that's a big question. I would define family as a group of people that I can trust really. I guess people can be your family but that doesn't mean you trust them. But to me a family member is someone, you know, I can trust with whatever.

The importance of articulating and demonstrating these values and characteristics in relationships with family members becomes particularly apparent in 18-year old Toko's explanation of why she does not want to have a close relationship with her mother:

My mother was in Australia when I was a kid. She was never really a part of my life. No support, no nothing. Now it's the other way around. I am looking after her rather than her looking after me. She treats us [me and my siblings] differently even though I am the first born. Um, she didn't look after me ... but my other siblings after me she was the one who looked after them and she pets them more than she does to me. But even though she did that to me, I still look after her but I don't want to be close to her.

In the same vein, 23-year old Inano explains why she does not consider her biological father as family:

[My father] hasn't said anything. I don't mind meeting him but I don't really want anything to do with him, my father because I am 23 now. So, it's been so long. He hasn't contributed anything so I am done. I don't care.

32-year old Mere comments:

So, I don't ... this sounds really bad but I don't consider them siblings, the children that my father had with other woman. I don't! I know and I tell people and we acknowledge each other as being brother and sister or brothers and sisters, um, but I don't consider them family. It's like bang, and it's like part of, I think the difference is ... it's the time. We have not put in that time to get to know each other.

These statements suggest that while young women constantly highlight the importance of family and the relationships with family members, they make conscious

decisions about when and with whom they will activate their relationships (see Mattingly, 2014; Das, 2010a, 2007). This means that family in Rarotonga is better described as a network of people who actively participate in each other's lives for a long time, provide continuous support, interact frequently, and most importantly share and express emotions and feelings such as loyalty, trust and love. People who do not comply with these characteristics are not considered family even though they may be blood related. The importance of a family relationship is expressed through what someone does, is able to do, to give, invest and sacrifice to uphold the relationship rather than in terms of a biological connection. 23-year old Puretu puts it succinctly:

Family for me I would say is, um, it's not only just by blood. They can be family when they were always there for you and supporting you. Um, so I mean if I am down and they stop there to comfort me I would consider them as family. Someone that I can approach to discuss certain matters with them or that I am open with them, um, so I would consider them as my family as well. I do consider my friends as family too, um, because I know that I can trust them, and whatever I will share with them that, um, it will be kept to them only and it won't be shared outside. So, I think to me family is ... not and sometimes is basically having that person that is a mother figure and you have a father figure. Someone that can actually, um, correct you from wrong to right and will always be there in terms of encouraging you to do something, to achieve something that you want to achieve. So, I think that's what family is to me: someone that will support you in terms of your decision making.

The important role family members, particularly parents, occupy in young women's decision-making processes with regard to their intimate partner relationships will be elaborated in more detail below. What I have shown so far is that for young Rarotongan women, family is constituted through actions and the values and emotions people express towards them and hence through active relationships. Young women's statements show that a person who does not articulate these values and emotions is not considered family despite their blood relation. Yet, young women consciously consider,

negotiate and decide whom to include in their circle of family and who has not earned this place.

The different family relationships young women have, practices within and lived experiences of family relationships as well as the processes of how someone can become a family member and with whom processes of becoming a family member are encouraged by parents are the focus of the remaining part of this chapter. Paying attention to how young women construct their family relationships, how emotions are expressed towards them by family members and how they express their emotions and feelings towards their family members highlights young women's agency and sheds light on the role relationships with family members play in young women's decision-making and negotiation processes. The moral components these relationships possess play out most powerfully in those moments when young women are confronted with moral tensions and obstacles, a point I will return to in more detail in the following three chapters.

Mothers

I always said my mom's like to trip my rock, my best friend (laughter). We fight all the time, we don't agree on anything at all but she is probably the one person I can confide in. The person I trust most regardless of what, you know, what the information is like. I trust her! She will keep it to herself. You know, mothers ... yeah, she is probably the only person that I can really trust. (Maara, 27-year old woman)

Mothers are considered as the main caregivers of children. They are expected to look after and satisfy their children's needs. Mothers have a major responsibility in teaching their children cultural values such as *aro'a*, respect and discipline and the appropriate associated behaviour in specific social circumstances. They are judged critically, especially by other women, if their children do not demonstrate these values. In other words, mothers are held responsible for ensuring their children become 'good' Cook Islanders.

A close relationship between mother and child is encouraged and remains particularly intense while the mother is breastfeeding. However, in contemporary Rarotonga most mothers work outside of their home. This prompts many mothers to give their babies at a very young age to another usually female person who takes care of the child while she is working. Childcare centres are a very new development in Rarotonga and most mothers told me that they would only leave their children to a childcare centre if they know and trust a person who works there:

You know, I would never give my child to a stranger. This is irresponsible and selfish. No, I believe you won't find a mother here who would do that.

Previously the mother's mother or the father's mother looked after their grandchildren. They even encouraged their daughters and daughters in law to support their family financially while they were looking after the children. Nowadays, it becomes more difficult to find a person who will take care of a child because most grandmothers also work outside of the home. My host parents Mama Vara and Papa Tere have earned a high reputation in Rarotongan community for their child rearing skills. Mama Vara was particularly known for her patience, knowledge and loving attitude towards babies. She was constantly approached by mothers and grandmothers to take care of more children and people often praised her as 'real' Mama when I told them that I live with Mama Vara and Papa Tere.

During the time of my fieldwork, Mama Vara and Papa Tere looked after four children: one baby girl, a 4-year old boy and two 7-year old girls. The young boy was always brought by his mother around 8 o'clock in the morning. As soon as Tutai climbed out of his mother's car his eyes ran over the veranda and the garden. If he could not see Papa Tere he would start to get nervous and would call out 'Papa, Papa'. Usually Papa Tere answered from the back of the garden but if he could not hear him Mama Vara

jumped in and told Tutai where Papa Tere was. As soon as he knew where to find Papa Tere he started running. His mother usually waited and chatted with Mama Vara until Papa Tere and Tutai came back to the veranda. She kissed her son and fondled his head before she stood up, left the veranda and approached her car. She slowed down and looked back at her boy before she started the engine of her car and went into reverse. Every morning, it was visibly hard for her to leave her son.

In my conversations with young Rarotongan women, they articulated strong perceptions about the character of their mothers. They often described their mothers as rocks who give them stability and security. Someone they can rely on and turn to seek advice as 23-year old Kaua describes:

Yeah, I will go back to her because a mom is a mom and then when you did have, you know, you never had a good relationship or even through you both have downfalls at all, you always know that your mother will always be there. No matter what ... a mom will always be there to protect her baby no matter how big you are.

As girls and boys grow up, the relationship between mother and son differs from the relationship mothers have with their daughters. Sons are encouraged by their mothers to remain at home as long as possible. They are urged to try several women before they make the decision to settle down in a serious relationship. Mothers want to hold their boys at home as long as possible and they are extremely critical when speaking of their son's girlfriend or their daughter in law. Mostly their actions and attitudes are described in terms of being a 'good' or 'bad' woman. Interestingly, a daughter's partner, once approved by both parents, is less likely an object of mothers' and other female family members' judgment and complaint.

Mothers often told me fearfully that they expect their sons to forget all about them when they start having their own family because their main focus will be directed towards

them. Contrarily, a daughter, especially the eldest, is expected to take care of her own family as well as her parents with the same intensity and attentiveness. In this sense, the relationship between parents and their daughters, particularly the eldest or only daughter, seems to be lifelong and reciprocal. Parents care for and feed them when they are young and expect in return that their daughters care for them when they are elderly and their daughters are adults (see also Baddeley, 1978, p. 168). Interestingly, several older people told me that usually both eldest daughter and son have been expected to take care of their parents and siblings even if they have their own families. Being the first born, a boy or a girl, both have been valued in the same way in pre-Christian times. However, some historical accounts indicate that there has been a strong preference in the past, particularly after the arrival of Christianity, for the first born to be male because the oldest child is not only expected to take care of their parents and siblings in the sense of financial and physical support, they are also expected to protect the family and take on the lead of the family in the case of a father's absence or death (Ritchie and Ritchie, 1979; Gill, 1979b [1892]); Beaglehole, 1957). These ideas are not only rooted in local notions of gender and the behaviour culturally expected of men and women within the family and the wider society, but also in indigenous perceptions of social-political organization and power, and the importance of seniority within these perceptions. Men are generally expected to be the head of the family but as Wilkie Rasmussen (1995, p. 8-9) states it would be misleading to underestimate the position of the eldest daughter due to her seniority towards both her male and female siblings. Indeed, my data strongly suggests that in contemporary Rarotonga the gendered nature of this responsibility shifts and becomes more and more an obligation that daughters take on, as 27-year old Maara describes:

My brother, he is not strong enough to take on certain tasks. He just kind of, it's not that he doesn't love us, but to him it was just too much of a burden. Even him being the eldest, you would think that he would step up kind of look out for us. But, yeah, to him it was just too much. Well, I

don't blame him he's got his partner and kids as well. Uh, I also have my partner and my kids and I have another four kids after that but for me I like to make sure that all my family members are ok regardless of what I am going through. That's how my dad brought me up and that's literally what I do now.

The changing gendered nature of the responsibility to take care of parents and siblings signals the importance of having a daughter. This became particularly apparent when I spoke to an older woman about customary adoption (see also Chapter Six). When she was pregnant for the third time, she expected the third child would be a boy. She already had two boys and her brother approached her to ask if she would give her child to them because he and his wife were not able to have children on their own:

I was ready to give this child away. Everything was arranged. However, when I gave birth and the nurse told me it is a girl, I couldn't do it. I always wanted a girl who will take care of us [me and my husband] when we are old. So, I kept her and canceled all arrangements. It was hard for my brother and his wife but at the end they understood.

Maternal kin

The relationship between children, mothers and her relatives is usually very warm and affectionate. This is particularly the case with mother's sisters who usually live in close proximity. They are considered as a second mother to the children especially if the mother of the children has difficulties in taking care of her children. This is usually expected if a young woman who is not in a serious relationship gives birth to a child (see also Dodson, 2009). Young, single mothers are described as more interested in seeking pleasure by going out and perhaps looking for a stable partner than caring for their children. The care is then expected to fall to the young mother's sororal kin as 24-year old Teina's experience exemplifies. Her older sister was 18-years old when she became pregnant:

She didn't have the responsibility of a mother to her child. So, um, she ran off, left her kids. So, I had to be there to be, to mother these kids and I

think I spent my whole life like watching these kids. She wasn't there to mother her child. At that moment she wasn't in a steady relationship. I had to take the responsibility because there was no one else. My parents were working and she was not, yeah, she wasn't there, so I had to take care.

Since they were born Teina nurtures and cares for her sister's children. She sees herself as a mother to her older sister's three children rather than as an aunt. This feeling is reinforced by the fact that her sister's children live with her and her mother in the family house while her older sister lives alone in a smaller house in the same section. Teina's *aro'a* for her sister's children led her to step up and take on the responsibility "because there was no one else". This situation "engender[ed] new or intensified moral responsibilities" (Mattingly, 2014, p. 5) for Teina requiring an evaluation of her own character but also the character of her sister. While Teina expressed understanding for her sister's behaviour she questioned her character as she acted in a way that she did not expect her to behave and in which she herself would have never behaved.

Fathers

Fathers are more like a, um, our shield, more like our rock to lean on. Fathers are our protection. They will always be there. (Poko, 22-year old woman)

In Rarotonga, fathers are considered as the head of the family even among single mothers and women who live alone. Fathers represent their families in public and are seen as the main provider and protector of the family. They are expected to support their family financially in terms of housing, food and other practical items. Sometimes, these expectations place fathers in a difficult position. Jobs are limited in Rarotonga and in some cases women have to take on the role of the main provider by working outside of the home. This often leads to struggles for men as it undermines their status in public and the family as well as influences their own self view and feeling of being manly.

As stated above, mothers are considered as the main caregiver of children and fathers are not expected to contribute in the same sense to the daily care of children as mothers. It is, therefore, not surprisingly that men, in their role as fathers, are rarely discussed in scholarly writings about childrearing and the upbringing of children in Rarotonga as well as in many other Pacific Island countries. However, during the first months after a child's birth, fathers adopt a huge part of the responsibility to care for the child and the mother, particularly if there is no older woman living with them. The father supports the mother by staying up at night if the child cries or looking after the child when he comes home from work so that the mother can rest or do other work.

The relationship between fathers and their children is usually marked by restraint especially in terms of emotions and feelings. The expression 'I love you' is seldom used and young women agreed that their mothers and grandmothers say 'I love you' much more often and easily towards them and their siblings than their fathers. Some of my interlocutors could not remember if they have ever heard these words from their fathers as 24-year old Teina remembers when she spoke about the relationship with her father:

Uh, I would say we had a connection like we had a love connection sort of. I mean it was hard for him to express himself. Like he never showed, um, he had a funny way of showing his love. I think that goes for a lot of fathers I know. I guess funny is not the truth term. I think it was hard for him to express himself. He was never open about his feelings towards us. Like he is not like my mom. My mother would say 'oh, I love you' and stuff, 'have a good day' but with him it was 'yeah ok, bye'. And I find that over here a lot. They [fathers] really find it hard showing their emotions and things, love, intimate sort of thing to their kids. So, I guess we had a good relationship. He's, um, like I could always talk to him and, um, any matter that I am finding hard to deal with like he would always been my go to person for help. So, if I talk to my mom, it just makes me miss him more because, um, he is, I think he was a clever man too, like he just knew everything.

Teina's experience has also been expressed by other young women who described their fathers as source of knowledge. The absence of displayed emotions and feelings is

expected to be compensated by mothers and grandparents. Saying this does not mean that fathers do not articulate emotions towards their children in public especially if they become a father for the first time.

Aunty Va'ine's granddaughter was expecting her first child during my time in Rarotonga. I saw her and her partner several times when I visited Aunty Va'ine. Tua was very supportive and protective over his wife. He helped her to manage daily life by bringing her food, helping her at home and making sure she had enough rest. He spoke in an encouraging manner and expressed his pride in soon becoming a father. When I saw him several days after his daughter was born, he had a constant smile on his face and his whole body language mirrored that he was very proud to be a father.

The kind of authority fathers exert over their children differs from a mother's as it is conceived as supreme (Buck, 1971a [1934]). This notion has its roots in pre-contact Rarotongan society and was reinforced by Christian teachings. Bilateral descent is recognized and visible in the custom of sharing children between the father's and the mother's side but greater weight is attached to the patrilineal descent of children (Buck, 1971a [1934]). Women in a stable relationship usually leave their parents' home and move in with their husband's family or to a place allocated to him. If all children live with their birth parents, children's teaching is primarily based on the values, traditions and history of the father's family. However, if the father does not come from Rarotonga which usually means that his family does not have land on the island and the couple is not in the economic position to rent or buy a house on their own, a man moves in with his partner's family. In this case the teaching of the child is based on the mother's family history, tradition and values (Buck, 1971a [1934]). The same applies if a child has been given to a woman's parents.

Grandparents

I do love my mom, like we enjoy each other's company, but it's sort of being our grandmas. We kids are drawn to our grandmas. I got drawn to my grandma. I think because of the time she spent ... and not only that! Because of the treatment you get. I think because you get spoiled a lot and, um, you get away with things where if you are with your mother you know, you never get spoiled and you don't get away with a lot of things. I think kids sort of see that. I for example, if I need something, oh, especially if I want money, I go to call her and it's just oh yeah and, um, so, she's just sort of 'ok', yeah, she's sending it over sort of thing, yeah. We rely on them for sweets and things, things I can't get out of my mother. I just normally like turn to my grandma sort of thing. Because when I explain it to my grandma, like I haven't even to explain everything. I will just say 'oh look I need some money for this' and she will be 'ok, all right then. How much?' whereas my mom she 'why do you need this and why should I give you this?' It's uhhh, yeah. (Teina, 24-year old woman)

The relationship between grandparents and grandchildren as well as children and great-grandparents is characterised by affectionate love and is usually more relaxed than the relationship between parents and children. They call each other derogatory names and joke and swear freely in each other's presence (Rasmussen, 1995). Grandparents are expected to indulge their grandchildren who often like to stay with them to avoid problems they might have at home, confident of their grandparent's agreement and protection (Baddeley, 1978). Frequently, grandchildren are taken by grandparents to live with them for a certain amount of time to keep them company or help with the work in and around the house. According to the traditional practice of sharing children, some grandparents might also request from their children that grandchildren stay with them as substitute for their own children who have left the house. Such a request is often made by grandparents to their daughters who can hardly deny it (see Chapter Six).

Some grandchildren have a closer relationship to their grandparents than their parents as it is the case for 18- year old Toko:

My mom and dad separated. They send me back to my grandma. I am very close with my grandparents especially with my grandfather. Yeah, they were like my real parents, but they were just my grandparents. Even now they, oh, my grandma still rings, checks up on me, sends me stuff, food (laughter). Yeah.

Toko had been left with her grandparents by her mother when she was a baby. She grew up with her mother's parents and she considers her grandparents as her parents; whereas when we spoke about her mother, she referred to her as birth mother. During our conversation Toko often related her experiences and decision-making processes to the fact that her birth mother had left her. She was hurt and blamed her birth mother for the limited possibilities she had in several aspects of her life. She also struggled to make sense of the fact that her birth mother treats her differently than her younger siblings. Her birth mother's behaviour and actions when Toko was a small child and also today are, according to Toko, not how a mother should act and behave towards her child. For this reason, she does not consider her birth mother as her 'real' mother. Instead, Toko calls her grandmother mother. Her grandmother holds this position because she fulfills the characteristics young women expect from a mother; in particular she brought her up, supports, loves and takes care of her. This shows that, in Rarotonga, the terms used to address people indicate the actual quality of a relationship. Nevertheless, despite the fact that her birth mother did not act as Toko expects a mother to act and behave, Toko takes on the responsibility of a first-born daughter and cares for her birth mother and her younger siblings.

Sibling relationships

Ah, we have a weird relationship. Um, we do fight at times but, uh, I think there is something that always connects us together I guess. Um, even though we do fight but then we still have time to, like, laugh about things or catch up about, uh, or talk about the fight that we just had and just laugh about it. Um, so I would say my relationship with my siblings is actually quite good. (Puretu, 23-year old woman)

The ideal sibling relationship is one where siblings support and help one another as well as take care of each other. Small conflicts and disputes are expected to occur regularly and to be solved quickly (Rasmussen, 1995). Young women told me that there is nearly nothing that they would not do for their siblings. Older siblings play an important role in their younger siblings' upbringing and socialization. In some circumstances the relationship between siblings alters when older siblings take on parenting responsibilities, as 27-year old Maara describes:

Literally I play mother to my siblings as well. Um, I don't know how I took on that role. My mother is a very soft person. She screams a lot through. Uh, my kids, my siblings (laughter) yeah, they are my kids um, yeah, so, I think mom and dad are at an age where 'oh gosh, we've been through this so many times why don't you just let it go. Just do not worry about it' but yeah, that's why I sort of take on responsibility. So, um, say if my sister and my brothers are going into trouble I am the first point of contact. I have to look after, to look out for them. I have to go out of my own way to take care of them both emotionally and financially - definitely financially (laughter). So, yeah, I play mother to my siblings as well. They don't listen to my mom and dad. So, if they play up mom and dad call a meeting and I will be there and I will be telling them off or my mom calls me and says 'the kids don't want to go and hang the clothes up on the line' and I say 'why?' She says 'they don't wanna listen to me!' I answer 'so, put them on the phone' and then she says 'they don't want to come up front. Oh, wait a minute they gonna go now'. So, they fear me in a way (laughter).

Particularly young women mentioned that they are expected to look after their younger siblings without complaints. This does not mean that older brothers are not expected to take on these responsibilities but, as mentioned above, in Rarotonga raising a child is primarily perceived as a woman's task. In some cases, older siblings take on more responsibility for their younger siblings than the parents do. They nurture, teach and punish as 32-year old Mere explains when I asked her which kind of relationship she has with the siblings she grew up with:

Oh, it's not a sisterly one. It's more of a father. I am their dad. I am but I am also, no, I would tell I would be the mother and the father. I know that, like, with my younger brother it is, like, I was the one who was always at home. So, they would come home from school, dinner was ready. Um, I was the one helping them with their homework. I was the one cleaning the house. I was the one there making breakfast in the morning. I was the one getting them ready to go to school. Making the lunches, make sure that they have done, you know, whatever was homework -- readings, assignments, making sure that certain forms are signed. That was me. I know they often refer to me as mom. So, I think that's why at the end I considered that relationship to be not so much a brother and sister type thing but more the mother/father because I would discard the hiding as well. So, it's like if you screwed up you're getting your punishment. So, you know, you stole the two dollars that was for the bread today, now we've got nothing to eat, great! You get your hiding.

Same-sex sibling relationships

Despite the seniority principle, same-sex siblings often develop a close and affectionate relationship which is supported by parents who assign them tasks together while they grow up (Baddeley, 1978). They are usually comfortable around each other, share secrets and jokes as well as confide in each other. Small disputes and conflicts between sisters are considered as a normal characteristic of a sibling relationship by young women, as 24-year old Moana notes:

My sister and I are close but, you know, obviously its siblings, you know, they argue and fight now and then but it's yeah. But we have a close relationship the three of us. We feel comfortable just talking about whatever comes up and then there is nothing really bad we don't talk about.

23-year old Kaua adds:

So whatever happens or whatever goes on they [my sisters] will never say no to anything. I have my sisters as all-protective and helpful. Yeah! So that's what I would think.

Having the knowledge that their sisters protect and support them from “whatever will come” has been named by the majority of my interlocutors as one of the strongest character attributes a sister should embody.

In Rarotonga, as in many other Polynesian Islands, women of all age groups also call other females of the same generation sister even if they are, in the Western sense, cousins, aunts or friends. Women usually know which type of relative or non-relative the persons are to which they refer to as sister. However, it is the social and moral characteristics, a person’s behaviour towards one another, the time they spend with them, spatial and emotional proximity rather than a biological connection that makes a person a sister. This applies similarly to men. In the same way as women, a lot of men address not blood related male persons as brothers. Yet, I have never heard a man saying this is my sister or a woman addressing someone as her brother if they are not blood related.

Brother and sister relationships

In the Pacific, above all kin relations it is the relationship between brother and sister which some researchers mark as “the starting point of kinship” (Toren and Pauwels, 2015, p. 4). As a core relation, scholars argue, the brother-sister relationship contains and reveals broader implications for local understandings of marriage, gender and sexuality throughout Polynesia (see Alexeyeff, 2000, 2009a & 2009b; Hecht, 1983; Shore, 1981 & 1982; Gilson, 1980; Schoeffel, 1979; Baddeley, 1978; Rogers, 1977; Tuara, 1976).

Sherry B. Ortner (1981) indicates that there is a distinct difference in the character and structure of the brother-sister relationship between Western and Eastern Polynesia. In the Western Polynesian society of Tonga, for example, the brother-sister relationship is highly visible and stereotyped, but also specialised and differentiated in public by certain verbal representations and avoidance behaviour (Philips, 2003). In this

relationship the brother should subordinate himself to his sister, especially to his eldest sister in terms of respect and the submission to her will. This is exemplified with the sister having the privilege of naming and/or claiming his children for adoption. Françoise Douaire-Marsaudon (2015) points out that in relationships between sisters and brothers in Tonga, respect and avoidance are mandatory and any allusions by gesture or words regarding sexuality are prohibited (see also Morton, 1996; James, 1995; Helu, 1995; Gailey, 1987; Bott, 1981; Rogers, 1977).

Penelope Schoeffel (1995, p. 88) argues that the brother-sister relationship in Samoa is understood in terms of “mutual support and formal mutual respect”. This is expressed in everyday life through a more privileged treatment of girls in comparison with boys. Girls sleeping quarters are more comfortable and in the household they have to carry out the light, indoor working whereas boys have been allocated to the harder outdoor work. After one of them reaches puberty a strict avoidance of the siblings is instituted; usually resulting with the boy moving out of the family home. Linguistically, brothers would never refer to their sisters as ‘women’ (see also Tcherkézoff, 1993). According to Schoeffel (1995), the Samoan term for women, *fafine*, includes a reference to female sexuality and this is only politely recognized if she lives with her husband. Therefore, similar to Tonga, sexuality is a delicate matter in Samoa. Brothers and sisters are encouraged to avoid any unnecessary interactions (see also Ortner, 1981). This includes also touching the personal belongings from each other, particularly the sister’s sleeping mat and clothes. Schoeffel (1995, p. 89) explains that this relates back to an old belief after which “intimate contact[s] between sister and brother would have supernaturally dangerous consequences to the brother”.

It is not supposed that sisters and brothers have any knowledge regarding the premarital sexual activities of the other. Penelope Schoeffel (1995) as well as Bradd Shore

(1981 & 1982) argue that premarital sexual relationships are forbidden to Samoan girls because a sister's virginity represents her brother's status. Therefore, a sister's chastity is highly controlled and protected by her brothers and other male kin (see also Tupuola, 1998 & 2000; Freeman, 1983; Ortner, 1981). Bradd Shore (1989, p. 160) asserts that in Eastern Polynesia there "are no brother-sister respects and no significant etiquettes in the cross-relationships". However, his research was based in Samoa, a Western Polynesian archipelago.

Contrary to the relationship between sisters, Josephine G. Baddeley (1978) notes that, similar to Western Polynesia, in Rarotonga the relationship between brother and sister has been characterised by restraint and avoidance (see also Rasmussen, 1995). Girls were restricted from going in their brother's room or from sitting on their beds (Baddeley, 1978). Mata Tuara (1976) noted that sisters and brothers were not allowed to dance with each other in a traditional dance. A sister was also forbidden to kiss her brother's face; instead, as a sign of respect, she had to kiss his hand. Brothers and sisters were also supposed to address each other with a special vocabulary and brothers were specifically taught to respect their sisters (Hecht, 1983; Tuara, 1976). Sexual matters should not be mentioned in front of cross-sex siblings, nor should either flirt in the presence of the other (Rasmussen, 1995).

I used the past tense to describe these restraints because most of them have not been mentioned by young Rarotongan women during our conversations. Even some older women described the relationship with their brothers as strong, easy and open. Others, however, told me that they were not allowed to walk in front of their brothers wearing short skirts or shorts. Some young women said that discussing sexual matters with a brother was also considered inappropriate. However, young Rarotongan women's opinions with regard to this restraint are divided indicating that the level of restraint varies

depending on the family and on the kind of relationship young women established with their brothers. It may also be that the nature of brother-sister relationships is changing, as 24-year old Rongo indicates when she described her relationship with her younger brother:

Oh, we share most things. He went into my wardrobe borrowed some of my cloth because with me, sometimes I like to wear, um, like the men's Nike tops because they're a bit bigger than some lady's ones. So, there is like some clothes and he said 'oh yeah, I like that', that men's Nike top, he borrowed that. But when he left I went to his wardrobe and I was like 'Oh, I like that, uh, Puma t-shirt. I am gonna wear that or I wear that jumper' (laughter). Yeah and if I need to talk I can talk to him. Not about everything ... there is something ... uh, relationships and all that. He would tell me if he had a partner and I tell him if I had a partner but like, like sex because this is like he wouldn't want to know and I wouldn't want to know because it's private I would say.

Other young women told me that discretion in terms of their romantic relationships is only a marker in their relationship with older brothers whereas 24-year old Teina did not mention any restrictions describing her relationship to her older brothers as close and trustful commenting: "I would definitely talk with my older brother about my relationship. He is quite open minded." In the same vein, 23-year old Kaua notes:

We are like just all close. Yeah, I would say we are. I am more closer to my brothers than my older sisters. I mean, or I don't know if it's just my family but in my family, I find it that the boys when you do explain things to them it's just kept between them. Yeah! With girls, um, sometimes they were jealous, yeah. With the boys, uh, with my brothers, everything is just so smooth and they were always be there because, you know, no matter what, they will always protect. So that's what I think. That's what I expect of my brothers. Yeah, I find it easier to relate with them or find it easy just to relate things with them or to open things up with them than my sisters. For example family, sometimes I have family problems or at times my, um, my relationship I will talk to them, to the older ones not the young ones. They don't really care (laughter).

24-year old Apii considers "Uh, I think the older we are getting the closer we are getting", suggesting that whether young women speak with their brothers about their romantic

relationships depends not only on the kind of relationship they have but also on their age.

20-year old Nga adds:

I am comfortable talking to him [brother] about my love life, yeah. Well from my perspective only a few do that! Some siblings don't really get along, some don't have siblings, well, yeah, just a few people (laughter). It depends on how they were brought up in their home.

Intimate partner relationships

When I asked young women if they consider their partner as part of their family some immediately answered 'no' without further comments whereas others like 23-year old Inano replied:

Uh, my family comes first, maybe my partner second. I am not too sure whether I would separate him from my family maybe. ... I guess I just did (laughter).

Most of my interlocutors consider the relationship with their parents as the most important relationship in their life and in line with 24-year old Apii they do not believe that this might change in the near future:

No, I don't think so, probably not. I think it will still be the same order, my mom, dad, um, my son, my partner and my brothers and then all others. It will probably change in twenty years' time but now if we marry in three, four, five years' time it won't change.

Young women's statements indicate that partners are not considered family immediately after a relationship starts but that they might become part of the family in the future. This process is usually smoother if parents approve of their daughter's partner. In her influential analysis of transnational adoption in Norway, Signe Howell (2003, p. 465) argues kinning is not simple a process of bringing a "previously unconnected person" into a family; moreover, it is a process of socially and in Rarotongan society a process of relational and morally becoming a particular kind of person. More precise in

Rarotonga, this means, a person that families, particularly parents, anticipate for their daughters and as such welcome and appreciate in their families as a new family member.

Historical, as well as current, accounts indicate that marriage has often been arranged as alliances between two families of different descent lines (Henry, 2003; Buck, 1971b [1932] & 1971c [1932]; Beaglehole, 1957). In pre-contact Rarotonga, this often took place between the heads of two households long before the couple reached the marriageable age (Gilson, 1980). Marriage outside of the descent group was desired whereas a marriage between two people recognizing a common ancestor closer than the fourth or fifth ascending generation was prohibited (Gill, 1890 & 1979b [1892]; Buck 1993 [1939]). The recordings of high chiefs marrying close relatives indicate that both rules are not applied consistently in pre-contact times. However, Tom Davis's (1947, p. 198) statement that incest was punishable either by physical means or by the death curse administered by a sorcerer would support the assumption that especially among commoners a compliance with the rules was preferred and encouraged (see also Gilson, 1980). While there can be reasonable doubt in regard to the practical applicability of these incest rules, literature suggests that sexual relations between siblings have been considered as *tapu* and should definitely be avoided (Crocombe and Holmes, 2014 a & b; Gilson, 1980). In 1845 after the French have enforced their will to the people of Tahiti, the council of Rarotongan *ariki* decided that foreigners should have no influence in local governmental decisions, they are prohibited to buy land and to marry a native woman (Gilson, 1980; Morrell, 1960). In any way as Rev. William Wyatt Gill (1979b [1892], p. 5) explains: "It is the duty of the parents to teach their growing children whom they may lawfully marry, the choice being extremely limited".

In Rarotonga, as in many Pacific Island societies, marriage among commoners usually took place in form of cohabitation which could easily be entered into and broken

(see Linnekin, 1990; Buck, 1971b [1932]). A couple's families' consent ratified a marriage. Marriage arrangements for children of chiefly or high-ranking families were much more formal and received high public interest. Marriage alliances were discussed among parents or the elders of the family. Initial agreements were presented and finalized in public meetings to receive the support of the community. In some cases, where the marriage was considered unsuitable by parents, a romantic marriage took place "in which the parental wrath was braved" (Buck, 1971c [1932], p. 42). According to Ernest Beaglehole (1957, p. 177) the consequences of entering a marriage without parental approval were serious:

The [...] couple are pretty well thrown on their own resources and have to start a new household, without the respect, acceptance or help of either set of parents. Such marriages often prove extremely brittle and are cracked by divorce in short time.

Most of these practices have been transformed over time. However, the importance of parental approval of a child's future partner has been maintained nearly unchanged. In fact, parental approval is paramount to young women in regard to all important steps in their life such as choosing a career, moving out, studying overseas, becoming a mother (see Chapter Four and Six) and their future partner choice. Who a partner is, what he does for a living, from which country, family and socio-economic background he comes as well as his behaviour and actions towards a woman and her family influence parents' decisions to approve or disapprove of their daughters' relationship. Thus, as will become apparent throughout this thesis, parental approval has also another dimension. Parental approval and support of young women's decisions is not only important to young women because of the influence infringements may have on their relationship with their parents and the wider family but also because of the serious implications parental approval has on the kind of agency young women are able to express.

Unsurprisingly, most young women raised great concerns about introducing their partner. Indeed, they were afraid of their parents' reactions particularly that they could request an end to the relationship. Young women commonly named three main reasons why parents would deny their approval. First, their partner is a foreigner. Second, he comes from a family or district of low socio-economic status and third, but most important, if they are related, as 27-year old Maara's experience exemplifies:

Me and one of my previous partner we were literally just, we were cousins. We don't know that, we were really close cousins too. We didn't find out until later. So, it was 'ok'. It's not my fault. I didn't know that we were cousins. We had to end our relation. It's hard, of course it's hard. The only thing is you just got educated, um, you, your kids on their immediate families as long as they are, you know, not with their immediate cousins, sisters or brothers and that's fine probably second, third cousins after that.

Nearly every young woman I spoke to had a story to tell similarly to Maara. The small size of Rarotonga and the close bonds between families limit the number of available appropriate partners. Finding out and talking about who is together or sleeping with whom is a great part of the daily gossip among Rarotongan women of all age groups. Women share their observations, speculate about the status of intimate partner relationships and discuss possible kin relations with great amusement and interest. Particularly young women's relationships are under consideration and the discovery of a kin relation triggers public outcry. One of the main issues discussed is the question 'why did they not know that they are so closely related?' Women try to find explanations such as for example the woman or the man or sometimes both have either been raised overseas or have been adopted as a feeding child by another family. In either case women would come to the result that the couple had not been taught their genealogy. This accusation lasts more heavily on the parents than on the young couple. The parents are responsible for teaching their children the family history and genealogy. Therefore, in the first instance, parents are blamed if their daughter or son enters a relationship with a family

member. Parents of both parties hope that the young woman did not become pregnant and, as Maara reports, the couple is expected to break up their relationship. Not all couples follow the request to break up the relationship. I often heard stories about young couples who stayed together and had children. People told me that some of them still live in Rarotonga, but the majority moved overseas because of the constant family and community disapproval, the shame their relationship brought over their family's reputation and the negative impact their intimate partner relationship has on the relationships with their natal family members.

What is considered an immoral relationship in this context varies among families. Maara indicates that in her family relationships between second cousins (grandparents are siblings) are considered appropriate whereas 28-year old Mereani explains that in her family the closest appropriate connection is one between fourth cousins (great-great grandparents are siblings). While Maara's and Mereani's statements refer to blood kin relations, 30-year old Teroro explains that blood relationships are not the only restriction. Moreover, everybody who maintains active relationships with the family and is considered a close family member is perceived as an inappropriate intimate partner by parents:

I was dating one guy before my husband. It was just a date, you know, we were just seeing each other and he was from church. I have been seeing this guy from church which I shouldn't have. Um, he was a friend of the family. He was home every Sunday and so like something just grew there like there was just an attraction between the two of us, you know, we just had this attraction going and then, um, his mom also declined it. Uh, my dad did decline it as well like, you know, because nothing can go any further because we were still in school and, um, he was a friend of the family, no blood relative, but because they [he and his mother] would always be at home every Sunday, they are considered as family.

Restriction -- foreigner

32-year old Mere shares Maara's experience. During her adolescence, the fact that a lot of Cook Islanders are so closely related caused her much struggle and led her to make a serious decision:

I first dated when my grandmother was alive, when I came for holidays [to Rarotonga] and, you know, I was young and stupid. You go out, come home, bring someone back with you, wake up in the morning; your grandmother knows that person is there. She tells them to come out and you quickly realize after your grandmother tells you 'that's your uncle', um, yeah, that's it. I don't know all my family connections which makes it really hard. But I know that a lot of my relatives still end up with cousins, you know, just a cousin and just an uncles and stuff like that but it's still family. Uh, like I have cousins who are also my uncles just depends on whose side of the genealogy we're looking at. Like I have nieces who are also my aunties again depending on which side of the genealogy we're looking at. That's how ridiculous close it is. I am sure when I look back I am probably related to myself (laughter). So, that's a huge part of the reason why, um, I would never go with a Cook Island man - I don't do family! As soon as I know that you are a Cook Islander that's it you go on. It doesn't matter how good you are, how great you're looking, what a great personality you have, how much money you have in your pocket. As soon as I know you are a Cook Islander we're finished. That's it, done! My family wanted me to marry a Cook Islander but no I made a vow to myself and I told them 'Shut up, I would never marry a Cook Islander ever' because if I do marry them someday along the years I will eventually find out we are related.

In the same vein as Mere, 23-year old Kaua made a conscious decision not to marry a Cook Islander:

Others don't care. I am not saying anything of them but that was just my own thinking that I don't want to marry anybody because whenever we said 'oh hi' and then our parents ever had this 'uh, you know that you are related', you know, that is always something when we introduce a friend to them or introduce somebody I would say 'oh, I've never seen that person on the island' and when we do know the names our parents will finally say 'you know you are related?' To me I think it's just not right to be in a relationship with someone you are related to. It doesn't matter how far you are.

Both Mere and Kaua knew that their families would not be happy if they would choose to be together with a person from another country. However, for both women this seemed more appropriate than marrying a possible family member. Introducing their partner to their parents and wider family caused struggles as Mere explains:

My mother, she accepted him because she thinks he made me a better person. The situation was different with other family members especially in the earlier stages of, um, our relationship there were a number of family members who were against it. They weren't close family members they were the ones that lived here and again that came down to issues of land. Um, you know, telling me that 'don't think you gonna put his name on land', um, but then once they realized who my husband work for and what my husband's trait was, it was like 'oh, this gets gonna be valuable to us because we have mounted land and we needed to be cut down'. So yeah, my family sees a huge value. They saw that first before they saw my husband. They saw all the, um, value that he brought to them and our family as a unit.

Mere's mother who lives in New Zealand accepted her partner because she thought that he might have a positive influence on her daughter's character and behaviour especially towards other people; whereas Mere's wider family living in Rarotonga objected against her partner relationship in the first instance. Recognising that Mere's partner brings value to the family due to his job was the reason why her family members in Rarotonga accepted him as her husband and welcomed him as new part of the family despite his Fijian nationality.

For Kaua, having chosen a partner from another nationality has caused more serious and long-lasting struggles:

Nooo, I couldn't directly introduce him! It was hard! [I introduced him] two years later, after we started dating. Yeah, um, it was like every other parents here. They don't want, they don't want to like meet him or they never made an effort or they just weren't interested. But I think because it's just a small island so obviously they were, they will find out by others 'oh, your daughter is in a relationship'. Well, one of my parents said it was

because of his ethnicity, you know, his um, nationality. He is Samoan. That's why they don't want me to go with him.

Kaua's parents raised concerns about the fact that their daughter's partner comes from another country. Parents prefer their daughters to be together with a Cook Islander as long as they are not close family. A *Papaa* -- a person of Kiwi, Australian or European descent is also acceptable as 28-year old Mereani describes:

They would accept marriages which like when they are *Papaa's* so if they are Kiwi or Australians or they are just European but when it's a marriage into say whether where they're Asians or they are another ethnicity that's not European it's so rare. Europeans are more accepted because of our relation with New Zealand. So, there is more acceptance in this families, in this relationships because it's something that they are familiar with in history whereas with an Asian or with someone that's darker skinned especially someone that's Micronesian or Melanesian because culturally they are quite different. The same is with like Western Polynesians. It's how they treat the women, how the women are dressed, they are so different. So, you get a lot like my friend's grandmother was like, you know, 'don't stay with a Fijian' or 'don't stay with a Tongan' because cultural values are so different. Their consideration of women and what they expect from their women is totally different from us.

Parents may withhold their approval if their daughter chooses a partner from another nationality because they are concerned that their daughters might experience problems within their intimate partner relationships due to the cultural differences in status and dealing with women in a partners' home country. They expect that their daughter will be treated in a way different from how a Cook Island man would treat his partner and his family. Another important aspect is that parents do not know who their daughter's partner is. They usually have no information on their daughter's partner's family, where they come from, what they do for a living, the standing they have within their own community or the kind of moral values they have taught their children to embody within their family and community relationships. Additionally, parents are uncertain if a woman's partner will emotionally and financially concentrate on his new

family or if his attention will still be completely with his natal family as it is the case for 27-year old Maara's aunt:

One of my aunties, she is married to a Samoan and whatever wages he earns, he sends it back to his family in Samoa. The majority of his energy is concentrated on them instead on his own family here. This is really hard for my aunty.

These fears are also mirrored in 24-year old Apii's parents concerns:

So, she [my mom] was 'oh, you know, this guy he is Tongan and we don't know their culture' and she was like um 'I don't know about him being Tongan and you being Raro, I mean Cook Islander' and our cultural differences will affect the baby and our relationship. Um, but I think they want to get to know him more. That's the main reason. I mean my dad is more like 'if I give you away then, then I have, you know you are my only girl' and all these emotion stuff and they were just stop talking about it. But I think the main one is, you know, they wanna see how he looks after me and how he looks after our baby and how he runs the household and how he helps with finances and everything. I think that's the main thing. I think they just wanna see if he is capable of looking after me and our baby without them around!

From her perspective, Apii told me:

He is doing well (laughter). Oh, I think he is doing great! Um, he helps out at home and he helps out with the baby and he is always there and, um, I think he is ready. I think he is, but I am not my parents. I think parents will have a different perspective on how ready they think this person is to marry their child and, uhh, my poor partner has to live up to those standards (laughter). So, yeah, we've talked about it [marriage] but they haven't really given a yes yet. So, we are still not married because of that. I want to get married but I don't know! I think mom and dad's advice is probably still hanging over me. So, I know it's my choice but I need them to approve before I can do it. The plan is still in progress. We just need mom and dad to get on the horse and ride with us (laughter).

Apii's parents hold back their approval for two reasons. First, they are uncertain if and how his nationality will affect the relationship dynamic and, consequently, how he will treat her. Second, they are indecisive about whether her partner is able to take care of their daughter and their children and, hence, if he is worthy of becoming a part of their family.

Apii respects her parent's decision not to give them the approval to get married yet. However, she approaches the topic frequently with her parents whereby she highlights how her partner behaves towards her and their child, supports her with household chores and how he contributes financially. She also encourages him to visit her parents regularly, to have conversations with them and to help them around the house. To be patient and to wait until her parents "make up their mind" in combination with these activities is Apii's expression of *aro'a* for her parents as well as her strategy to negotiate between her own twofold wish to get married and respect her parents' wishes.

Restriction -- socio-economic status

30-year old Teroro's parents' struggles with their daughters' partner evolve around a different fact, namely that Teroro entered a relationship with a Cook Islander who lives and grew up in a Rarotongan district considered of low socio-economic status:

At first they didn't like it. They never accepted him. They just didn't. My husband drinks and smokes. He is not the most handsome looking guy or anything but I think they just judged him because of where he is from. He is from the western side of the village. So, they just judge them, I mean him and his family, because of that, you know. Like that side got a lot of crime going on like people stealing and domestic violence and all that other stuff and people come like most, the majority of the people don't even make it anywhere on that side.

Parents have great concerns if their daughter enters a relationship with a person of low socio-economic status. They fear that their daughters might adapt bad habits such as drinking and smoking or may become involved in criminal activities ruining their future prospects as well as the reputation their families hold in community. But most importantly, parents imagine their daughter's living and raising their children within a family environment of domestic abuse and financial hardship. In Teroro's case this led to the fact that her parents did not approve of her partner. They did not welcome him as a part of their family, making it as well challenging for her to call him a family member.

Conclusion

Evaluating and making accounts of others and themselves character and actions is a moral project young Rarotongan women constantly engage in particularly about their family members (Mattingly, 2014). In this chapter, I elucidated young Rarotongan women's understandings of family, the values and characteristics they identified as defining a person as family member and I described the relationships with various family members which are named by young women as most important to them. Contemporary young Rarotongan women identified relationships within the nuclear family and between extended family members who reside in close proximity as well as people who take active part in their lives and show character attributes and emotions such as loyalty, trust and love as the most important relationships in their life.

These values and characteristics are markers for the quality of the relationship between family members. The moral obligations and responsibilities young women feel towards each of their family members and if they consider these people as family members correlates strongly with these values and characteristics. Ideally, the relationship between mother and daughter is very close and open. Mothers are considered by young women as someone they can always rely on and seek advice from whereas the relationship between a father and his daughter is characterised by restraint especially in terms of emotions and feelings. Nevertheless, fathers are considered by young women as someone who always protects them. Siblings, be they sisters or brothers, are perceived as persons who support and help one another as well as take care of each other. The relationship, however, a young woman has with her father who did not take part in her life or a mother who has not cared for her or with siblings who she rarely spent time with lacks these values and characteristics. The differences among these relationships entail a moral component insofar as young women do not consider these people as 'real' family

members. The moral responsibilities they feel towards them are limited and the influence these people have in young women's decision-making processes is restricted or even non-existent.

Young women's stories suggest that a partner is not considered family immediately after a relationship starts; indeed, becoming a family member is a social and relational process. In Rarotonga, appropriate intimate partner relationships or marriages remain a family, not an individual, decision. Partner relationships and marriages take place between families not solely between individuals. Parents hold back or deny their approval because they doubt or are not convinced yet that a partner is the right person for their daughter. To convince a woman's parents, he has to prove that he fulfills a woman's and her parents' expectations on his character by complying with their values and norms characterizing a family member. He has to demonstrate that he is worth becoming part of the family as well as that he is willing and able to take on the responsibility to uphold and care for the relationship with a woman and her family. A woman's partner is considered a representative of his family and it is assumed that if he is doing well and fulfills all the expectations and takes on the expected responsibility that his family will do the same. The decision to enter a serious intimate partner relationship or to marry a partner means accepting the duties and obligations in regards to a partner's family. It also means welcoming his family members into their own family by becoming one family. Therefore, it is not surprising that most of the young women do not want to make this serious decision alone. Another reason, as will be elucidated more closely in Chapter Five, why parental approval of a serious intimate partner relationship is so important to young women is security. It is assumed that if a woman experiences problems in her intimate partner relationship she can go to her parents and ask for support whereas if she marries or enters a relationship without her parent's approval and she experiences problems it is hard for

her or even impossible to turn to her parents for help. Therefore, waiting for parental approval is not only a demonstration of young women's *aro'a* for their parents, but it is also a strategic security mechanism.

Chapter Four

Negotiating pregnancy and childbirth

I met 30-year old Teroro on a hot Thursday afternoon in May. Her youthful face was surrounded by long, nearly black hair which fell loosely over her shoulders. A knee-long, colourful skirt covered her body. She did not wear any jewelry except a silver necklace holding a small cross. Her warm brown eyes walked slowly over me with the same expression of curiosity and attention I recognized when I met other people in Rarotonga for the first time.

After a while, she invited me to take a seat in front of the house under the shade of a terrace roof which offered only a little protection from the street both in terms of visibility and noise. Only a few cars approached the road during this time of the day. Most people were at work. Rush hour would start in one and a half hours. I asked Teroro if this place suited her. Confident, with a smile on her face, and knowing exactly why I was asking, she took a seat on the other side of the table facing the street and looked straight into my face. We had not exchanged more words than 'hi' and she did not seem in a hurry. Instead, she picked a plastic bag of small dried fish from her handbag: "this is a delicacy from my home island" she said, while offering it to me. Seconds elapsed before I said 'no', uncertain about her reaction and wondering if I had destroyed our relationship before it could start properly. However, Teroro smiled, took a fish and introduced herself. Chewing on her dried fish, she told me what she had heard from her friend about my study and what it meant to her to tell her story. I did not interrupt; I just nodded supportively and with curiosity. Only the chooks were singing their long songs, loud and with the intensity as if their lives were depending on it, when Teroro started to tell her story -- the story of her way of life, her choices, her children and, most important to her, her relationship with her parents:

When I got pregnant with my first, with my son, um, I was kind of like neglected because I had my son out of wedlock. I was, you know, coming from my family being very religious than I had that [child] out of wedlock. So that was kind of like, you know, like my family was just ... yeah, just not supportive of me and I accepted it because that's the life that I chose.

I found out that I was pregnant before my 21st birthday, um so, like I knew next week is my 21st birthday and I found out today I was pregnant. I never said anything to anyone because especially my parents and my family, they were putting this up because I am the only girl in my family. I've got older brothers. I have two older brothers and a younger brother after me and I am the only girl and this is big, we are having a big 21st for your only daughter is like the best feeling ever like you just get spoiled and everything and I've saved all of that until after my 21st. So, a day after I had a big party, um, not a big party like I had a big function at home and everything and the next day I told them that I was pregnant. It was just a devastating blow because, um, I think it's tradition like I don't know if it is tradition or if it is culture here that you're not supposed to have kids before you're 21 or when you are 21 throughout the year. You can't have any children. It would be, um, to them it would be a waste of time. But like there is, like they have that saying like it would be a waste of time having a big birthday and then you gonna have a baby. Like a few of my friends they say you are not allowed, you don't have a partner on your 21st. You're supposed to be like holy and like pure for your 21st birthday and you wait till after your 21st to have all of that.

Anyway, when I told my family, I did get like a little hiding or something like that because it's, um, like not much of a hiding but like a big telling off and everything and I wasn't allowed back home. I wasn't welcomed back home. Um, they just they never spoke to me at all like even if we cross paths. It was like I was not their child anymore. I waited a whole nine months and then everything just got back into place when I had my son. I gave birth to him and then it just, um, like everything came just afterwards it was just, my parents' first [grandchild] and so, they just, they didn't, they never pushed me away, they accepted me afterwards. It took a lot of like, um, a lot of tears and a lot of crying and a lot of sorries and it took a while for my family to accept me back in with my husband. But now, like now, that I have kids it's like everything seems fine now. I mean it's tough. I know that sometimes they're a bit funny about me, um, doing stuff but they just going to like accept it now and it's all for my children. They've only come to accept me, um, us because of the kids because they want our kids to have a better life than the path that I have chosen.

Teroro's story clearly indicates how falling pregnant prior to one's 21st birthday and the following year is socially stigmatizing for young women in Rarotonga. It can lead to strained relationships, especially with parents. Sometimes, as in Teroro's case, this can mean temporary or total exclusion from the family. Parents expect and hope that after

their daughter's 21st birthday, when she has completed her education and found a good job, she will begin looking for a stable partner before thinking about motherhood. It is expected that young women will not become involved in serious romantic relationships before the age of 21. Connected to this expectation is the anticipation that they will not engage in sexual relationships. The reality for most young women, however, is different and almost one in five young women (18.1%) at the age of 19 and over half of young women (55%) at the age of 22 have given birth to at least one child (Cook Islands Government, 2015).

With such prevalence rates, the dominant discourse in Rarotonga about young women's pregnancies is generally one of moral outrage and patronizing concerns for young women's mental and physical wellbeing as well as for the future of young women and their children. However, as Christine Dureau (1998, p. 239) argues, "[m]aternity is more than a simple dyadic relationship, [...] it necessarily reflects, and is constituted by, other social relations" -- including, in Rarotonga, community and family relationships. Anthropological literature about maternities has not always captured how pregnancy and childbirth experiences influence women's community and family relationships or how women negotiate their relationships in these situations, though a strand of literature has begun to explore this avenue (Ngabaza, 2011; Ram and Jolly (eds.), 1998). I build on this literature and elucidate in this chapter how pregnancy and childbirth experiences during or under the age of 21 shape young Rarotongan women's community and family relationships, how young women deal with the moral obstacles along with pregnancy and childbirth and which strategies they use to negotiate their struggles and relationships within these local moral frameworks.

I show that the strategies available to young women in a particular moment are shaped through the unique coming together of the involved individuals, the women's own

personal histories and experiences which inform women's understanding and reasoning in a particular moment as well as the social, historical and cultural expectations for thinking and acting in these situations. Young women's pregnancies and births are embedded in complex local socio-historic-cultural contexts and understandings of relationships. They never occur in isolation and young women carefully reflect and negotiate their options and possibilities within the triad of their personal and social circumstances, individual desire, and family expectations. In line with Veena Das (2010a & b; 2007) who insistently argues that what is considered as 'good' or 'ideal' by individuals within a particular situation comes out of engagements with others and not from a higher agreed upon ideal that individuals strive towards, throughout this chapter, I show that the ways young women balance their moral dilemmas and the decisions they make related to pregnancy and childbirth correlate strongly with the range of support and approval their parents provide or withhold. This leads to the assumption that family relationships, in particular the relationship between daughters and parents, (might) stand above Christian socio-historical-cultural moral mores. Indeed, the closer the emotional relationship between a daughter and her parents, the more important it seems to young women that their strategies and actions respect the needs of their parents and are developed in cooperation with them.

Local framework of moral reasoning: Christian and pre-Christian perspectives on sexuality, intimate partner relationships, contraception and abortion

The intervention of Christian missionaries in local marriage practices, sexuality, gender, and kinship relationships, accompanied by imported notions about 'good' and 'bad' women and the ways in which these are articulated with local understandings, certainly frame the context in which young Rarotongan women experience pregnancies, childbirth and motherhood today. With the arrival of Christian teachings, in the majority

of Pacific Island societies, marriage has become the most important adult gender relationship and it is within this relationship where maternities should preferably occur. Jocelyn Linnekin (1990, p. 121) emphasizes that early ethno-historical sources agree that in pre-Christian Hawaii, especially for those who were not of rank, local “marriage was unmarked, casual, and ephemeral”. Cohabitation was the norm and could be easily entered into and broken. A more binding form of Hawaiian marriage, which could not be easily dissolved, “was the custom of the chiefs and the first-born children of prominent people” (ibid, p. 123). This situation was judged appalling by Europeans who considered the indigenous marriage adulterous. Christian missionaries, colonial officials and European society in general have all endeavoured to prohibit these supposedly immoral practices through the establishment of “a binding conjugal tie” (ibid, p. 121-122). This situation is representative of many Pacific Island societies including Rarotonga.

In Rarotonga, Christian missionaries arrived in 1823. They introduced changes to local marriage customs and conveyed guidelines of appropriate forms of conjugality focusing on nuclear families, cohabitation, sexuality, women’s and men’s roles within marriage and means of corporeal control over wives (Ama, 2003; Gilson, 1980; Beaglehole, 1957). The imposed sexual restrictions were not only reflected in moral teachings of the Church where sexual activities outside of marriage were deemed a sin, ostracizing people from Church society, but also in early legal codes such as the First Set of Mission Laws (1820) and The Blue Laws of Rarotonga (1879) (see also Siikala & Siikala, 2005; Henry, 2003, Williams, 1998 [1837]; Buck, 1993 [1939]; Scott, 1991; Forman, 1982; Brown, 1964). More precisely Section VI of The Blue Laws of Rarotonga (Council of Ariki, 1879, p. 3) titled “Husband And Wife” states that unmarried men and

women are fined \$4 each if they commit fornication. Buck (1993 [1939], p. 51) also stressed that being pregnant as an unmarried woman was implemented as a crime.³⁵

With the conversion of the people to Christianity, sexual relationships began to be perceived in moral terms by Rarotongan people and parents wished their daughters to remain chaste until marriage. Several accounts suggest that in pre-Christian time, high ranking women, particularly daughters of chiefs, were expected to remain virgins until marriage whereas it was less an issue for daughters of common families as long as they did not become pregnant (Beaglehole, 1957; Buck, 1971a [1934]). Pregnancy preferably occurred when a couple lived together, which constituted marriage among common people. The child was then perceived as legitimate. Illegitimate children from temporary unions were perceived as “a mistake” and “[t]he mother was blamed, not for having committed a sexual crime, but for having allowed herself to become pregnant out of wedlock” (Buck, 1971a [1934], p. 95). If the parents of both parties could not arrange a marriage and the child was born illegitimate, it was not condemned but often given to a family member (ibid.; see also Curson, 1969).

Contraception and abortion

Contraception, abortion and infanticide were all practised before colonisation in the Pacific (Oliver, 2002; Jolly, 1998a & b; Dureau, 1998; Rivers, 1922; Speiser, 1990 [1923], Gailey, 1987; Roberts, 1927). James Ritchie and Jane Ritchie (1981, p. 189) point out:

[In Polynesia i]nfanticide and abortion are ways of controlling the population when fertility exceeds the need for more people. They reflect a social desire to give the survivors the best possible chance rather than disregard for the value of life.

³⁵ The law was in force until 1899 (Buck, 1993 [1939], p. 51; see also Marriage and Divorce Act 1899). [<https://atojs.natlib.govt.nz/cgi-bin/atojs?a=d&d=AJHR1900-I.2.1.2.3&l=mi&e=-----10--11-----0Macetown-->; accessed 06/05/2020].

In pre-Christian times, infanticide and abortion have not been regarded as a moral issue. In Vanuatu, contraception and sexual abstinence has persisted but not increased since contact, whereas abortion, which was also “always known” became more common (Speiser, 1990 [1923], p. 40). Reasons included were a woman’s “desire for an easy life, her disinclination to be burdened with many children, and also her wish to disappoint a brutal husband” (ibid.). In the Marquesas and on atolls in Polynesia, food shortage has been adduced as a reason for abortion and infanticide (Oliver, 2002, p. 161). For the Cook Islands, William Wyatt Gill (1979a [1892], p. 1), a 19th century LMS missionary, mentioned that “[i]nfanticide was rarely practised in the Hervey Group [Southern Cook Islands], excepting at Rarotonga, where it was common”. He does not explain how he came to this assumption nor does he mention the occurrence of abortions. Ernest Beaglehole (1957, p. 180) reports for Aitutaki:

Natural abortions are not uncommon among elderly married women, especially towards the end of their child-bearing years. Criminal abortions are uncommon. They occur very rarely among unmarried girls, and only occasionally among married women tired of continual pregnancies. The only methods used are prolonged massage and reliance upon folk gossip about the efficacy of this medicine or that. It is believed that formerly native medical experts possessed a knowledge of drugs or herbs which were capable of contracting the uterus, but this knowledge is now lost or highly secret since it is a criminal offence in the Cook Islands to practice native medicine and no one will openly prepare or prescribe herbal remedies for fear of prosecution.

Missionaries’ moral and legal regimes interfered with practices which supported women’s actions and behaviour that limit fertility such as massages and traditional medicine.³⁶ Missionaries’ condemnation of illegitimate children may also have inadvertently encouraged secretly practiced abortion among young unmarried Rarotongan women. The majority of these laws and restrictions are no longer

³⁶ Until 1969, the Cook Islands Crimes Act prohibited the use of native medicine. However, W. Arthur Whistler (1985, p. 244) mentions that the law was rarely enforced and the Health Department took a positive approach as long as the practice did not impair the health of the patient.

incorporated into today's legal code with the exception of abortion.³⁷ However, the ideas are still incorporated in contemporary Rarotongan people's moral codes as Christians. They frame current public and family debates about topics such as sex, intimate partner relationships, reproductive health, contraception and abortion. This has strong implications on how young women experience and respond to their dilemmas related to pregnancy and childbirth within their community and family relationships.

Local frameworks of moral reasoning: Current perspectives on sexuality, intimate partner relationships, reproductive health, contraception and abortion

As previously noted, sexuality is not a topic commonly discussed openly in contemporary Rarotongan society. In fact, it is carefully circumscribed and encoded. Serious discussions about sex, sexual activity, contraception and intimate partner relationships are frowned upon within both the family and in public. Public comments in regard to these topics are often made in joking form and appropriately only by older people. Young women constantly told me that in public places they had been 'shut up' by older people if they started speaking about sexuality, their sexual desires, experiences or non-experiences. 19-year old Mata states:

When we girls talk about like our sexual intercourse with our boyfriend, girlfriend, um, what we did over the weekend and what not in a public place in front of, uh, islanders they growl us off. They will growl us even though they wouldn't know us they would growl us. Like they would talk to us in Cook Island and say it like why we're talking about that, we are too young, you know, we don't know anything about it, awkward to speak about that and our parents if they ever hear us will probably, you get a hiding and in trouble and a lot more. If we would speak about it [in public] we would get in trouble.

Only a few young women told me that a female family member, usually mothers, aunts or sisters, sit down with them explaining things related to reproductive health,

³⁷ Cook Islands Crimes Act 1969, Part VIII Crimes against the person, Section 202 – 207.

contraception and intimate partner relationships. The majority discovered these topics with their friends or on their own through ‘trying’ and researching the internet. 24-year old Apii commented:

My mom talked to me a lot about it [sex]. She said, you know, she saw a lot of my friends who were pregnant really young and they were all having these sexual activities and she kept telling me ‘you know you have to wait for the right person or when you’re ready’. She also talked to me about condoms and that stuff but I read more in-depth about it on the internet. It was really uncomfortable. Talking about my relationship and, um, sex and contraception, um yeah, it’s still a bit uncomfortable now but it’s, I am starting to, um, open up to her about it but it’s still not yet a normal thing to me. It’s still uncomfortable. I think she feels uncomfortable too if it’s too detailed. So, I try to make the both of us comfortable [laughter]. But she is really supportive. I think just having someone you know you can talk to about it makes me feel better.

Learning about sexuality is a cultural dilemma for young Rarotongan women. Viewed as violating local values particularly with regard to respect (see Chapter Two), there are several factors preventing young women from addressing issues related to sexuality not only in the presence of adults, particularly parents, but also in discussions with them. The main reason for young women is related to the fear that their parents’ perceptions about them might change, as 18-year old Vai points out:

It’s disrespectful. It’s weird. I find it weird talking about it with your parents. I know that they should be the first people to talk about it but because they are your parents, you expect them to think big of you like to think you are still that, um, innocent child that they brought into this world and everything and you know, you kind of don’t want their perspectives change. I mean they know that I am not that innocent, but I want to show that I am still the same person. I just want to show that I am still me and that’s why I can’t discuss it with them because if I discuss it with them their perspective of me will switch.

However, despite the fact that all young women consistently agreed that talking about these topics with their parents might be “awkward”, “weird” or would definitely be “uncomfortable”, they supported Apii’s last statement and highlighted that open discussions with their parents about sexuality, contraception and intimate partner

relationships are welcomed and might have impacted on their behaviour and the choices they have made when they were younger. 29-year old Ina puts it in a nutshell:

I don't think I found out through my parents. I found out through my peers and I know I was experimenting. To me that was like a healthy, you know, way. That was normal! That was fine I suppose and standard but looking back and after everything that I know now, I am like: 'Uh, not really. It didn't have to be that way.' It should be really the parents telling their children what sex is rather than them finding out through their peers, though, um, porn or something like that, you know, that's how they're finding out 'oh, that's how procreation works', you know, sort of thing. If I had learned about sex through different means I wouldn't have made some of the decisions that I have made, you know, in my younger years.

Reproductive health and contraception

In Rarotonga, sexual and reproductive health services are available at the hospital, the Red Cross, the Ministry of Health and the Cook Islands Family and Welfare Association (CIFWA).³⁸ The position CIFWA and other health care providers take with regards to women's reproductive health focuses on the health and wellbeing of women, not on moral aspects. Contrarily, the majority of societal debate perceives and evaluates women's sexual health as a moral issue. As I will elaborate below, this tension unfolds most obviously in the current debate about abortion.

All sexual and reproductive health services in Rarotonga are placed in central locations which are easily accessible; however, access to these buildings is also easily observed by others. This lack of privacy prevents many young women from accessing the services (see also White, Mann, Larkan, 2018; Tutai-van Eijk, 2007). Condoms are freely accessible on 19 dispensers placed at several public locations and bars around the island

³⁸ CIFWA is a non-governmental organization founded in 1987 which is dedicated to provide family planning and "save sexual reproductive health care in the Cook Islands" [<https://www.facebook.com/CIFWAYouth/>; accessed on 21/02/2019]. CIFWA Youth is an extension of the organisation focusing on young people. They work in strong collaboration with the Ministry of Health.

which are restocked weekly by the Cook Islands Red Cross Society and the Cook Islands Family and Welfare Association with condoms obtained from the Ministry of Health Pharmacy (Cook Islands Ministry of Health, 2018). Some young women expressed concerns of having a condom with them as well as using the health services because of the attached judgment and gossip if they are discovered. In Rarotonga, a young woman approaching reproductive health services is considered to be sexually active and having condoms with her when she goes out is mostly evaluated as a sign that the woman plans to have sexual intercourse. This is not something families expect of a ‘good’ young woman, wherefore it can lead to serious struggles. For this reason, young women often explained not to have condoms with them and consequently to use condoms very seldomly. Contrarily, 20-year old Vaine points out:

My family is very religious. Um, we don’t talk about that stuff in my family but my mom told me once that if I have to do that I should make sure to use condoms so that I don’t get pregnant and I do. I don’t want to embarrass them, their name and also I don’t want to have kids now. I am too young. I can’t even provide for myself. Therefore, I always have condoms with me. But don’t think that I go out having in mind that I will sleep with a guy. I haven’t done that yet and I don’t plan it. I just want to be prepared if it happens.

Vaine negotiates the dilemma of having condoms with her by putting her own and her family’s social status at the forefront, arguing that she just wants to be prepared “if it happens” because she does not want to embarrass her family publicly by being pregnant so young and she also knows that she is not able to provide for a child. Importantly, it was her mother who suggested using condoms thereby relieving Vaine of much of the moral struggle of how to be a ‘good’ young Rarotongan woman. Knowing that she will be prepared if sexual encounters happen and that she will not embarrass her family by being pregnant helps her to overcome the moral struggles accompanied by having condoms.

Abortion

Similarly to intimate partner relationships, sex, reproductive health and contraception, abortion is a sensitive and seldom openly discussed topic in Rarotonga. Christian moral principles and local understandings of ‘good’ women moralities in addition to the fact that the Cook Islands Crimes Act 1969 prohibits abortion except to save the life of a pregnant woman contribute to the strong disapproval of abortion in Rarotongan society.³⁹ During the time of my fieldwork, abortion became a major issue because the new Cook Islands Crimes Bill 2017 had been drafted opening up women’s possibilities to have an abortion for the following reasons:

A lawful procedure can be undertaken if the medical practitioner considers it as appropriate because in the practitioner’s opinion—

- (i) the continuation of the person’s pregnancy would result in serious danger to the life, or to the physical or mental health, of the [pregnant] person; or
- (ii) there is a substantial risk that the child, if born, would be seriously handicapped as a result of physical or mental abnormality; or
- (iii) the pregnancy is the result of—
 - (A) rape; or
 - (B) sexual connection with a family member, or someone other than a family member to whom the person is a dependent family member; or
- (iv) the person suffers a severe developmental impairment.⁴⁰

In August 2017, the Crimes Bill Select Committee started to consult the public to discuss the acceptance and meaning of the drafted Crimes Bill 2017.⁴¹ In December 2017, the Cook Islands Family and Welfare Association (CIFWA) met with members of other

³⁹ Cook Islands Crimes Act 1969, Part VIII Crimes against the person, Section 202 – 207.

⁴⁰ Cook Islands Crimes Bill 2017, Part 6 Crimes against the person, Subpart 2, Section 72.

⁴¹ During the meeting at Sinai Hall on 22 August 2017, Catherine Evans (Official Crown Law Office) explained that the Select Committee was formed in 2007 and the idea to review the current Crimes Bill was born in 2010 when they realized that society’s needs had changed. The penalties are low in the Crimes Act 1969 and do not meet the standards required today. The new Crimes Bill, she elaborates, had been created in collaboration with the Australian Attorney-General’s Office and had been checked by the NZPCO. The new act includes new areas such as female genital mutilation, domestic violence and prostitution.

organisations and interested individuals to discuss the Sections 72-77 of the Crimes Bill 2017 related to abortion.⁴² The meeting led to a submission to the Select Committee arguing that the named reasons for an abortion in the drafted Crimes Bill 2017 are not in line with human rights because they still limit women's possibilities to make decisions over their own bodies by having free access to abortion. Providing access to legal and safe abortions in the Cook Islands, they argue, would prevent women from seeking illegal and unsafe abortions. Further, it would reduce physical and mental suffering for women by releasing the force to carry out an unwanted pregnancy and would avoid secret traveling to another country which can be time consuming, challenging and expensive. Therefore, the submission recommended the retention of the grounds for "lawful medical procedure" identified within the drafted bill.⁴³

Young Rarotongan women's perspectives about abortion and the proposed changes to the Cook Islands Crimes Act 2017 in regard to abortion varied. Some stated resolutely that abortion is wrong because it is against Christian principles and their own beliefs. Others considered that while terminating a pregnancy is not an option for them, it should be available so that women have a choice to make a decision suitable to them, their families and the situation they are in. Community members, particularly religious leaders and older women, revealed great concerns and fears about the recommended changes regarding abortion and the suggestions CIFWA stated in their submission. One commonly heard statement in my conversations with older women was that if abortion was to be allowed in the Cook Islands, this would encourage young people even more to engage in unprotected sexual contacts, misusing abortion as a contraception method.

⁴² Organisations such as e.g. Cook Islands Civil Society Organisations (CICSO), Cook Islands Child Welfare Association (CICWA), Te Kainga, Punanga Tauturu Incorporation (PTI), Te Tiare Association participated in the meetings.

⁴³ Cook Islands Family and Welfare Association (2017). Submission for Review of the Crimes Bill, 2017, Subpart 2: Abortion.

However, more often they stated that legalizing abortion in the Cook Islands is not an option due to the Cook Islands Constitution and Christian principles. Statements such as “this [legal abortion] will never happen here because we are a Christian nation” or “People can go to New Zealand but not here; this is against our Christian values” illustrate these perspectives. Currently legal abortions for other reasons than to save the mother’s life are only accessible to young women when they travel overseas, usually to New Zealand or Australia. Several women admitted that sending a young, unmarried woman overseas to have an abortion is frequently practiced. This action is usually hidden from others and kept secret by parents because of the attached moral stigma surrounding abortion. Under certain circumstances such as incest, rape and being pregnant too young, without a stable partner and/or future prospects, abortion is perceived as a lesser burden than shaming the family publicly.

During the Select Committee community meeting at Sinai Hall on 22 August 2017, one member of the public, an approximately 50-year old man, expressed concerns about the fact that women can access abortions in New Zealand and he strongly disagreed with the proposed changes in regards to abortion in the Cook Islands Crimes Act 2017. Instead, he recommended enhanced control of pregnant women’s behaviour and prosecution for those who know that they are pregnant but consume alcohol and drugs and/or smoke cigarettes which, for him, is similar to initiating an abortion. One older woman’s statement brought the discussion to another level when she told me subsequent to the community meeting:

This [legalizing abortion] would be the beginning of the end. You can see that in a lot of other countries. America, for example, they legalized abortion and now you have terror attacks, people dying on the streets and a lot more moral failures. We cannot let this happen to our country.

Highlighting fears of moral decay which walk along with the incorporation of Western countries regulations and lifestyle in Rarotongan society, the debate about abortion seems

to disclose a more general fear of losing Christian faith and local cultural and Christian moral values. America, in particular, is seen as a country where people avert Christian principles, moralities and way of life. Terror attacks are evaluated as signs and punishments from God for the sins committed by Western countries' governments and their citizens. According to Christian principles, abortion is a sin and legalizing a sin may result in punishments such as terror attacks as experienced by the American people. The strong aversion to changing practices and laws around abortion expresses fear of what might happen to their country, communities and families if they would adapt more to Western modes of living and practices. Therefore, abortion has become an issue linked in public discourse with debates about threats to Cook Islands culture, nation and values. The rhetoric presented in this debate is less about women's lived realities than the ideological and moral creation of Cook Islandness and the ongoing anxieties regarding rapid social change.

Pregnancy

As outlined above, in Rarotonga, young women's pregnancies are foremost constructed in moral terms. Perceived as shameful and an embarrassment for the young woman and her family, it is not surprising that in most cases, when a young woman realizes she is pregnant, her first feelings are of disbelief and shock followed by uncertainty, fear and anxiety about how to share the news of their pregnancy. Teroro's story clearly indicated that the pregnancy of a young woman at the age of 21 or below contrasts society's and families' expectations of a 'good' young Rarotongan woman. Becoming pregnant at this age is not considered as appropriate age and gender-specific, norm conforming behaviour and it can lead to strained relationships with family members and the wider community. However, the parent's support and approval are paramount to a young woman especially with regards to important steps in her life. Understandably,

the greatest fear for most young women after discovering that they are pregnant is related to the reaction of their parents.

Puretu's story -- "I haven't told anyone"

Puretu: [My daughter] wasn't planned. Um, she just, I wouldn't say a mistake or an accident, but when it happened [my boyfriend] did ask me the week after if I have had my, um ... menses yet. And I was like 'no' and then he goes 'ah ok can you just check' and then I was like, ok, this is kind of weird [laughter] and then, um, then it crossed my mind that, ok yeah, maybe I was pregnant but I kind of ignored it. It mirrored through to me after two months I think because he asked me again that look you haven't had your, um, thing and I am like 'yes I did last month' and he just 'no I have been tracking you' [laughter]. So, he was tracking my, uh, then I went to check and when I let him know he was just so excited. Back then, I haven't told anyone -- just myself and him knew about it.

Anja: Why haven't you told anyone?

Puretu: Um, I am not really sure but, oh well, I think it's because I was still in school and I didn't know how people would take the news [laughter]. Yeah, so, I just kept that news to me until I told my parents. So, I got back here from studying in December then I told them that I become a mom. In the sixth months I think I was. I wasn't showing. So, everyone was still, um, wondering. When I told my parents that I was, um, pregnant they were like 'are you sure'? And I am like 'yeap, I am sure'. But they were so shocked and my dad was just a bit, um, mixed emotions I think [laughter]. Yeah, so, then I flew to New Zealand just to confirm and my godfather went with me doing the all the long way. When it was confirmed that I was carrying six months he informed my parents then. So, we kept that within my family until my parents decided to tell the extended family and everyone wanted to be the godparents [laughter]. Yeah, ah, we have that thing when the child is going to be baptized there should be a godparents with the child. And, um, my brothers wanted to be the godparents for her and my aunties and then my parents said 'no, we gonna be the godparents' [laughter].

Anja: Did you experience a change in your relationship with your parents when you told them that you were pregnant?

Puretu: Uh, actually ... yes but I felt like I got more closer to my parents then before. Um, in terms of before, I was afraid to tell them like stuff at school like when I failed in school but they already knew about it. But now, during my pregnancy, they were so open about it and they became, um, well overprotective and stuff. They wanted to make sure that I was eating the right food, um, getting the right exercise you know. It wasn't just my parents it was my brothers as well like they were there for me when I was

pregnant until I gave birth and then I lost it when everyone was focused on my daughter [laughter]. Yeah, but my relationship I think we got closer now when I gave birth like really close.

23-year old Puretu's first reaction to her unplanned pregnancy was denial. She waited and hoped that it might not be true. It took her two months to accept the thought that she might be pregnant and another four months before she was able to share the information with her parents. Her main concern was "how people would take the news" -- especially her parents. Being pregnant revealed her engagement in sexual activities to the public by mirroring at the same time that she did not follow what her parents had expected from her, in particular not to engage in sexual contacts at this age. At the time of her pregnancy Puretu was 19 years old and she feared that her pregnancy would jeopardize the good relationship she had with her parents and siblings. She knew that they would also be disappointed because she had not finished her studies yet.

Puretu never thought of an abortion. Her partner's positive reaction, her own denial and keeping her pregnancy hidden from her family until the sixth month eased her from the burden to consider an abortion as well as eliminated the possibility that her parents could approach the topic.

Puretu felt relieved when she revealed her pregnancy to her parents and discovered that after a phase of shock, uncertainty and "mixed emotions", they were supportive and became even "overprotective". Contrary to her fears that her pregnancy could jeopardize the relationship with her parents, the pregnancy elevated the relationship with her parents to another level. It enabled both Puretu and her parents to open up and discuss topics such as sexuality, intimate partner relationships, childbirth and future prospects which have been perceived as difficult in the past by both parties. In short, Puretu's pregnancy blurred the strict local cultural and moral rules in regard to respect and the associated appropriate behaviour towards adults in Rarotongan society.

Apii's story -- "I wouldn't talk about it"

Similarly to Puretu, 24-year old Apii related that she just had passed her 21st birthday and was in her last year at the university when she discovered her pregnancy and that she struggled with the disclosure especially to her dad:

I am really close with my mom. So as soon as I found out I had to tell her first and then we both argued who has gonna tell dad [laughter]. No one had the heart to break my dad's heart. So, I told my mom, ok, I got myself into this situation I better tell him myself. But meeee, uhh, I didn't call him I had to email him to call me ... hack it was hard. But my dad reacted better than my mom [laughter]. I don't know maybe it was just because I was on the phone. I didn't see how he was reacting but he was really supportive. He encouraged me to take this semester off to come back here. So, I can be with my mom and prepare for the baby's birth.

Apii was always very supported and spoiled by her father during her childhood. As his only daughter, she knew that she could receive nearly everything what she desired from him and sometimes her mother had to step in to "keep it balanced" towards her brothers. Apii described her relationship with her father as very close and open. She always discussed major decisions with both her mother and father beforehand to receive her parents' approval and support. The disclosure of her pregnancy, however, was very different from the decisions she had to discuss with her father previously and caused her extreme struggles because "I could not change the fact that I was pregnant". Therefore, it was rather telling him the consequences of a decision she had already made which she had never done before.

Despite the struggles to tell her father, Apii was lucky and pleased as her father as well as her mother were supportive from the beginning with regards to her pregnancy. Yet her parents' discomfort and struggles evolved around two other facts, namely that they did not know the man with whom their daughter had entered a serious romantic relationship nor his nationality (see Chapter Three).

Mom was a little upset because they didn't know about my partner. She wasn't really angry about me being pregnant it was more me not telling them about my partner and them not spending time with him to advise me if this is the right guy [laughter], if he is matured enough to raise a family and then the cultural differences. He is Tongan.

Not having any knowledge about their daughter's partner and that they could not make sure that "he is the right guy" for their daughter before she became pregnant disappointed Apii's parents more than the fact that their daughter was pregnant at that time in her life.

The parent's approval of a young women's relationship is considered a mandatory moral obligation (see also Chapter Three). Having their parents' approval of their relationship, prior to a pregnancy, has been described as one aspect of being a 'good' young Rarotongan woman by women of all age groups. In the same vein, Apii explained the importance of her father's approval for her pregnancy and what it meant to her when I asked if she thought about an abortion.

Nooo, um, because I was with my partner two years before I was pregnant. Well I wasn't planning getting pregnant but, um, I growing up in a Christian family like, you know, we go through at Sunday school they talk about how it's a sin to have sex before marriage and it's a sin if you got pregnant and you are not married and it's a sin if you abort and so all these things came into my mind and then I said, oh well, I have done enough sin. I don't think I can do more sin [laughter]. More sins, nooo that's probably the worse sin of all sins that I could have probably done is to ever think of abortion and that's the first thing my dad said. He told me don't you ever think of aborting the child [laughter]. So, that was kind of like a seal of approval from him [laughter]. Yeah, so I know, I like, I've thought about it but I didn't, I wasn't thinking of abortion, of aborting my baby it was, it's you just automatically think about it but no it wasn't an option for me. I was, I think I was ready ... well I wasn't, it wasn't planned but as soon as I found out I think I knew I was ready. I think the best part was because my partner was supportive about it too. He was happy about it but we were both at uni, students, we were both worried but he said he wants it and he will do everything to support us. So, I think that probably make me feel better. ... [Turning serious] I think if, if I am being asked, to didn't go the way I did maybe I would have done it but I wouldn't talk about it.

Apii identified Christian socio-cultural moral ideas of how a young Rarotongan woman 'should' act as main reason not to consider having an abortion. Having violated 'good' women's moral obligations by having sex before marriage and

becoming pregnant out of wedlock she thought that she had done enough “sin”. Adding abortion to the list would have brought her more away from the aspired (Christian) ideal of being a woman than she already thought she was.

Apii’s story reveals that her moral sentiments regarding abortion resonate with dominant Christian societal views of moral knowledge and practice. Relieved that she did not have to consider terminating her pregnancy but could instead follow the conveyed and aspired Christian moral viewpoints, her parent’s approval and support enabled her to step back into the way a ‘good’ young Rarotongan woman is expected to be. Therefore, Apii’s statement not only highlights the influence of Christian teachings in young women’s decision-making processes, but it also demonstrates that young women’s choices and reasoning regarding abortion are tied to a particular social and personal situation, where a woman’s relationship to and the approval of her parents strongly correlate with young women’s considerations around having an abortion.

While Christian values played a major role in Apii’s decision not to have an abortion, it is clearly visible in her last sentence where she concluded that if her boyfriend would not have been supportive and her father would have suggested it that she might have considered an abortion despite the implication it suggested of failing morally again. Reiterating the imperative of parental approval and support described by all my interlocutors, Apii’s statement also indicates that parental viewpoints and the relationship to the parents stand above moral expectations from the church and society. For this reason, young women’s lived realities appear to question societal moral mores regarding how a legalization of abortion might influence young women’s decision-making processes, suggesting that the change of the law might not impinge on the influences governing a young woman’s decision. It rather seems to be the reaction of the young

woman's parents and the support they provide or withhold which may or may not lead to considerations about abortion by young Rarotongan women.

Continuing Teroro's story -- "There was no one else"

While Apii's and Puretu's parents were both supportive of their daughters during their pregnancies easing much of the associated burdens, Teroro's reality appears quite different:

I had moments where I just cried to myself like, um, I am not gonna lie on it, but I felt so suicidal. Like I put a lot of blame on me, not listening and I had, like, flashback moments where I just, like, I shouldn't have done it like this, you know, if I had done it their way I wouldn't be where I am, you know, where I am, like, pregnant and, like, living with a different family that I haven't known for, like, a whole lifetime and living in a different village that I know that is like really rough to be living in ... that's how I saw it. It was really hard. I don't know I can't explain it anymore but it was just, like, it was so ... [tears running down her cheeks] at the time, I've got nobody besides him. [When] I had met him and I was like so in, like, honeymoon stage that I forgot all about my friends and my cousins and my family. So, when I was carrying and ... and being ... you know, like pushed out from my family ... there was no one else to turn around to but to him. There was no one else because I had pushed away everybody.

Teroro's parents' disapproval of her pregnancy, resulting in an exclusion from the family, triggered strong feelings of loneliness and failure and also led to the fact that Teroro had no place to live. Her lack of financial resources did not allow her to rent a house or apartment and state housing is not available in Rarotonga. Her friends and wider family turned away from her partly because they disapproved of her wrong behaviour and the resulting pregnancy, but foremost because she had pushed them away by "forgetting" all about her friends and wider family when she had met her partner. Having not maintained her relationships to her wider family and friends isolated Teroro in a way that, once pregnant, she had no one else to go to except her partner; therefore, moving in with his family was the only solution for her. She struggled with the adaption to the new place and people even if "they were really supportive". To live with 'strangers' during such an

important time in her life and not to be supported during her pregnancy as well as not being taught and prepared for the birth of her first child by her own family and friends evoked strong feelings of loneliness and sadness which strengthened her thoughts of having chosen the wrong path in life and being punished for it. Teroro's struggles at that time led not only to thoughts about ending her life but also to considerations about terminating the pregnancy:

I did. I did think about an abortion, but I thought about it, but I never thought anything else about it like just ... just thinking about like ... if I get an abortion I mean ... I still had my Christian values to look back on like I still thought about it but it just like now when I look back on it even I didn't want to and I do look back, you know, like happy I didn't go for an abortion at all. But I do think sometimes like if I've had an abortion I wouldn't be as happy as I am now that I am 30.

In the same vein as Apii, Teroro's decision not to have an abortion was strongly influenced by the Christian values she had learned in church, her family and the wider society. Knowing that she had jeopardized her family relationships by becoming pregnant too young, to have an abortion would not only have contradicted her Christian values but would also add to her list of (sinful) inappropriate behaviour bringing her even further away from the path of the 'good' Rarotongan woman her family expected her to be. Therefore, in retrospect, Teroro is happy that she did not abort her child despite the hardships she faced during her pregnancy and the process of giving birth:

I had complications and I had to get sent over to Auckland to have my son and my mom and dad pushed for me to go. But before that, like, before they had pushed for me to go to Auckland to give birth they already told me I should have listened. I shouldn't have gone, I should have listened to them and not have this ... not that they wanted me to abort but I should have listened to them from the beginning and just wait until I was married or just waited a bit longer instead of having fun. They said that the complications were affected by a lot of things and it involved, um, the things that I have done before and the things that I was doing like while I was carrying my son and like not listening.

Notified by one of her aunties, Teroro's parents came to the hospital to support their daughter when she experienced difficulties during her pregnancy close to her son's

expected day of birth. Unexpectedly, her parents accompanied Teroro to Auckland for the birth but before they left Rarotonga they made her explicitly aware that her complications were a direct result of and a punishment for her improper behaviour and decisions she has made in life. In Rarotongan society, complications during pregnancy and labour as well as miscarriage are generally considered a sign that the mother had not behaved properly before or during her pregnancy. This behavior could include not following her parent's and societies rules and expectations of a 'good' woman by being involved in sexual relationships and getting pregnant too young as well as a mother's behaviour, her moves, her actions, the tasks she does, the food she ingests and her relationships with others during pregnancy are reflected in the birth process (see also Morton, 1996). In this context, 32-year old Mere stresses that a woman blames herself and is blamed by the public when she gives birth to a disabled child:

It's always the mother's fault! In the past, disabled people have been hidden from society by their families. Sometimes they were not allowed to leave the house and they did not have contacts outside of their families. Even today most of the families give us the feeling that we are less worth than our siblings and cousins. They try to keep us away from family gatherings. We are not involved in the different activities. They keep us away. There is a fear in society [because] to have a disabled child means that parents foremost the mother has sinned and this is a curse.

This perspective was echoed by several older women who pointed out that problems during labour, miscarriage or giving birth to a disabled child publicly displays a mother's moral failures bringing shame to herself and her whole family. These notions are closely linked to local ideas of how immoral behaviour and wrongdoings of others affect a person and vice versa. In regards to that, Beaglehole (1944, p. 179) reports about the sickness of an infant in Pukapuka, another island of the Cook Islands:

[A]s a last desperate attempt to effect a cure, the parents and relatives decided to hold a confessional over the child. Perhaps if everyone concerned confessed his or her sins, this might relieve the child from the necessity of suffering for them. This is good Pukapukan doctrine of the old days. An outraged god would mend his dignity by inflicting sickness on

anyone in the family of the wrong-doer, not necessarily on the sinner himself.

Through their own moralities people seem responsible for others particularly their family members' wellbeing. A person's behaviour might cause misfortune to themselves, a family member or, as Maara expresses, to the whole family.

Maara's story -- "The family came together"

Maara: I fell pregnant at 18. I hadn't actually told them, you know, that I was pregnant. They just knew. My mom was like, you know, I always said my mom is my rock, my best friend but me and my dad's relationship we were very, very close to each other like very close but then just this one incident and it kind of just went sideways. Um, he took a month off. He actually run away for a good month because I fell pregnant. My dad perceived me as me being the eldest I have to be the more responsible person and if anything happens to him he knows that I will be here to look after the siblings and my mother just in case something happens to him. In his eyes or in his mind at that time I would say like me being the sense of his world I fell pregnant and then chaos! To him it was chaos! So, me being on a way and the child's father is not in picture, you know, he ran away back home. He stayed there for a good month. It took my aunty some convincing that he was going to come back, um, but then after that he just kind of got used to it, to the idea of me being pregnant. Then at eight months, um, I had a stillbirth [tears]. So, we didn't have that baby and probably this was the first time that we saw our family kind of came together as one. And it was hard! It was very hard like, you know, having to go through all that, losing a child. But it made us stronger in a way and, um, for me personally it made me stronger. It made me stronger but I really didn't want to go through that again. So, when we had the second one, the one when I was 21, um, sorry Anja I am still very emotional about it [tears]. We all were excited like it was more of a second chance for our family, a second chance for us but that all went sideways. Seven months, when I was seven months we nearly lost him. So, we had him prematurely [tears]. It was very difficult. First, second and third year of his life we spent majority of it in hospital and [voice dropping] it was hard. Um, on top of that I had to, kind of, still in mind what happened to my first child and I knew what I have done wrong. I am sorry [tears].

Anja: Take your time [I gave her a tissue].

Maara: Thank you Anja. ...

Anja: [I waited until she calmed down a bit] When you lost your first child you said the family came together as one.

Maara: Oh, yeah! You know, um, with mom and dad, like their relationship was very rocky at the time they had bills to pay, they had us to mind and, um, me being in that situation they just you know, it was hard for them. They said ‘oh, what kind of future you’re going to have?’ Um, so, when that happened like we did all come together, it’s more of a mutual understanding of what, you know, what’s more important and what’s important is literally family regardless of what situation are you going through families will fight and you are getting angry with each other but at the end of the day, um, we all still need each other in a way. So, since then we kind of had, it was like a wakeup call for me [tears] ... regardless of what I do now revolves around my family. I will always put them first only because if things go sideways in the future I have no one else to lean on but them and the same likewise to them as well. Anything happens to them they have me to lean on. But yeah, that’s my little rough ... start. It was hard but it was good, it was a good rough journey I would say [laughter, still with tears in her eyes].

Young women consistently told me that their parents were shocked and upset when they told them about their pregnancy. Mothers were usually described as more supportive and understanding than fathers and most women were afraid to tell their fathers. Young women described the relationship between father and daughter as special. In this relationship, protection, support and adoration of a father for his daughter are tied up with high moral expectations on his daughter’s behaviour. Young women know that they are expected to restrain their personal desires out of respect for their families (Alexeyeff, 2009). They are seen as representatives of their families and their actions and decisions are evaluated in that sense. Particularly young women’s bodies and bodily purity are understood to be a mirror of the young women’s families’ moral standing providing evidence of a father’s skill to appropriately lead the family (ibid.). This is not to imply that parents do not assume that their daughters might engage in sexual contacts; rather it highlights the importance for young women to hide these encounters particularly by not becoming pregnant. Inappropriate behaviour by the daughter, especially her being pregnant too young, out of wedlock or sometimes with no stable partner or knowledge of the child’s father can cause doubts about a family’s moralities and, therefore, a woman’s fathers’ ability to lead his family properly (see also Beaglehole, 1957). The consequences

are not only a decline of the woman's and her parents, especially her father's, reputation among the wider family and society but also the invocation of feelings of shame and self-doubt in fathers, as Maara described.

When Maara's father discovered that she was pregnant his world turned into "chaos" which he could not resolve. His coping strategy was to leave Rarotonga, his family and the related problems to evaluate the situation and to deal with his feelings. With the support of his sister, he decided one month later to return to his family and to accept Maara's pregnancy and to support her. It took a long time until he came to terms with his oldest daughter's pregnancy. Maara's stillbirth brought the family to a turning point which they resolved by coming together, reevaluating what is really important and prioritizing their family and the relationship between family members above other things. Especially Maara perceived her stillbirth as a "wake up call" and an opportunity to return to the aspired way of being a 'good' young Rarotongan woman by caring more for her family members and maintaining harmonious family relationships.

When Maara became pregnant with her second child, she perceived it as a second chance for her family, a chance to demonstrate that she had changed and now follows the way of a 'good' woman and Christian values. Having her second child prematurely and nearly losing that child brought not only her thoughts about her stillbirth back, but also reminded her of her wrongdoings when she was younger. In her perception, the experienced difficulties of her second pregnancy are related to her decisions and behaviour which lead to her first pregnancy for which she and her family were now being punished again by having Maara's second child born premature.

Kaua's story -- "It's not too late"

Unlike Apii and Teroro, 23-year old Kaua never thought of an abortion when she became pregnant at the age of 21. Already excluded from her family because of her

parents' disapproval of her relationship, she moved in with her partner before she became pregnant:

My relationship, it's actually broken the rule. So, when we were in a relationship we weren't allowed to sleep over or to stay – nothing. I was completely shut up. I had to move out. I moved in with my partner because of the isolation. After that, my parents never wanted me to come home or just to visit – nothing, until I rigidly told them that I was expecting and then, um, my dad had no choice that, you know, we had to. He did pull me in a meeting with them. They, he is going to try and made an effort this time to, to change things so what has happened. So since then we actually worked things out and now we all fine.

As opposed to the experiences of Puretu, Maara and Teroro, Kaua's pregnancy was not the reason for her exclusion or strained family relationships. Instead her pregnancy provided the basis for reconciliation with her parents. The pregnancy of their daughter, particularly the knowledge that reconciling was in their grandchild's best interest allowed Kaua's parents, especially her father, to come together and discuss what had happened between them and to accept their daughter and her partner back into the family. Yet, Kaua's struggles during her pregnancy were located in a different place to the others, namely that although she had been together with her partner for three years, they were not married when she became pregnant:

He's been asking me, begging me [laughter] to marry him the years before but I just wasn't really ready to get married. Yeah, I wasn't ready until I got pregnant. We were brought up in church, I was born and raised in church and knowing the principals I knew what was the right thing for me [to do]. I knew it was the right thing but it was just not what I expected because I expected, you know, get married and then have kids after. That's what I really wanted but because things were already too late but then to me I've thought 'oh, it's not too late, I am still, baby is still inside, you know, I still do the right thing'. Not doing the right thing but it was part of doing the right thing because when we grow up in church we believed that, um, from man and woman to be sanctify together as one and to be sanctify together as one through marriage. So, that's what I believe and my parents really wanted me to get married soon, you know. All they said was baby. And so then when he asked me again I said ok, we will get married. So, our wedding was planned within one week and the more shocking news was the next day [after the marriage] I gave birth [laughter].

Kaua knows that her behaviour which resulted in her being pregnant out of wedlock as well as staying with a partner her parents did not approve of is not in line with Christian moral teachings about how a 'good' young Rarotongan woman should behave. Marrying her partner with the approval of her parents before she gave birth eased some of the burden she carried. Simultaneously, getting married before giving birth to her son transformed not only her status as woman from an unmarried pregnant woman to a married pregnant woman but also the status of her unborn child from illegitimate to legitimate. Her marriage, therefore, enabled Kaua to return to the way of a 'good' Rarotongan woman.

Conclusion

As Veena Das (2010a & b, 2007) insistently argues, what is considered as 'good' or 'ideal' by individuals within a particular situation comes out of engagements with others and not from a higher agreed upon ideal that individuals strive towards. The higher agreed upon ideal for a young Rarotongan woman is not to become pregnant before or at the age of 21 and young women expressed great fear before disclosing their pregnancies to their parents. They reflected broadly how being pregnant at the age of 21 or below had affected themselves and also others, particularly their parents not only in terms of their relationships but also in terms of status, emotions and health.

As I have shown throughout this chapter, young Rarotongan women's pregnancies are not solely individual experiences women undergo in isolation. Indeed, pregnancies reflect and are effected by community and family relationships (Dureau, 1998). Displaying a young woman's moral failures to the public, a young woman's pregnancy reflects badly upon the whole families' moral image. Thus, as highlighted throughout the chapter, the kind of relationship a young woman has with family members, particularly parents, can add to the stress and trauma a young woman might experience or, conversely, they can offer support and ease a young woman's burden (see Das, 2010a

& b; 2007). In line with this, young women carefully reflect and negotiate their options and possibilities within the triad of their personal and social circumstances, individual desire, and family expectations. The ways in which they balance their moral dilemmas and the decisions they make related to pregnancy and childbirth correlate strongly with the range of support and approval their parents provide or withdraw. In the latter case, as young women's stories revealed they can stand above Christian social, historical and cultural moral mores. Moreover, it is this familial relationship which shapes young Rarotongan women's reasoning processes. Therefore, it is not per se about young women's pregnancies, it is also not about the relationship between a young woman and her partner. Indeed, it always depends on how a young woman engages in all her other social relationships, particularly with her family members. This dictates what becomes important and when, what is considered as success or failure, and how situations and actions are evaluated by the involved parties. In this sense what is considered as 'ideal' is in practice always negotiated between and in cooperation with family members.

Negotiating infidelity in intimate partner relationships

In this chapter I examine young Rarotongan women's thoughts about infidelity, its 'normalisation' in Rarotongan society and consequences for ending a relationship. I argue that with a partner's infidelity, significant transformations occur in young women's sense of self, their well-being and the nature of women's moral agency with regards to their relationship. Like many other women worldwide, young Rarotongan women contend with infidelity in their intimate partner relationships. Indeed, the threat and/or reality of experiencing infidelity is, along with violence in their home, the most frequent named fear of young Rarotongan women within a partnered relationship. Young women expressed their desire for monogamous love partner relationships and their aversion regarding the 'normalisation' of men's faithless behaviour while simultaneously having been socialized with the knowledge that betrayal might happen. Examining infidelity as a site of women's agency seems odd considering that the agency women are able to enact seems jeopardized in this situation where basic principles and requirements of women's agency, their emotional and bodily integrity, are compromised. Yet, infidelity is a site of society's contestation of women's agency. Women who are in a relationship with an unfaithful partner are often described by Rarotongans in pitiful terms as weak, poor girls lacking self-confidence and self-esteem with little or no agency. Phrases like 'there is plenty of fish in the water' mirror only one appropriate agentic option for women -- to end the relationship and leave their unfaithful partner.

Yet Rarotongan women's thoughts, decisions and actions within their intimate partner relationships reveal that their own subject positions are not completely determined by these social discourses (Das, 2007; Mahmood, 2005). Indeed, social discourses often

overlook the context women are situated in, including women's relationships with others, women's feelings and hence women's enacted moral agency within this situation. A conceptualisation of agency, as Saba Mahmood (2005, p. 14) in her ethnographic study of women in the piety movement in modern Egypt powerfully expresses, has to move beyond terms of "subversion or resignification of social norms" and should include motivations, desires and goals. Mahmood (2005) argues that a focus on forms of attachment to and the negotiation of social norms reveals spaces for women's agency which are shaped by their own needs, beliefs, and desires. Socio-historical-cultural values, rules and norms provide a sometimes contradictory mix of constraints, resources and practical possibilities for women's agency (Mahmood, 2005). Staying with an unfaithful partner does not necessarily mean a lack of women's agency; rather, whether a woman stays or leaves depends on different factors such as society's gender expectations, a woman's emotions, religious belief and her relationships outside of the partner relationship. The assessment of a woman's agency, therefore, requires a careful consideration of the social, historical and cultural contexts in which each woman is situated. Staying with an unfaithful partner can be a woman's performance of expected gendered norm-conforming behaviour or an attempt to assert her own will to uphold a relationship which is desired without the infidelity or simply the best option due to economic, religious, social or family factors. Infidelity is often about betrayal, fear, disappointment, anger and emptiness. But it can also be about hope and love. Culture provides the context for assessing infidelity as meanings, coping strategies and options are learned and modeled within the family of origin and wider society.

Young Rarotongan women are raised with strong gender specific expectations (see Chapter Two). Gender identity and what one desires is foremost developed in the context of family roles. Positionality and moral agency develop through the constant

negotiation of community and family needs and one's own place within the family. The identity from which young Rarotongan women express their moral agency prioritizes their families within gender norms. For some women, this can produce a sense that the relationship needs to be upheld while the infidelity needs to stop. Rarotongan culture stresses the idea of family before oneself and the articulated disapproval of divorce in deeply religious families may lead to stigmatization. This affects particularly those young women who grew up in a family with strong connections to Christian discourses and doctrines. This is not to say that Rarotongan women living and socialized in these families do not leave an unfaithful partner, but that the ways they negotiate leaving are different than for Rarotongan women who are members of other families with a less strong connection to religious principles and doctrines.

The 'family before self' approach emphasizes the role of family in young women's subjectification process whereby it is not surprising that women's coping and negotiation strategies for issues within their intimate partner relationship will respect the needs of others, especially parents. In the same way as starting a serious relationship (see Chapter Three), an individualistic approach to deal with problems or to end a relationship is highly unlikely to resonate with young women because the resources to deal with these situations are gathered in cooperation with their parents and wider family members. Consequently, the context to understand young women's moral agency within infidelity is in the relationship with a current partner *and* the relationship with their family of origin. Paying close attention to the nature of these relationships reveals what a partner's unfaithfulness means to young women, which strategies and tools they have to negotiate infidelity within their partner relationships and when and how they will use them. All these factors may open up certain options for young women while, at the same time, limiting or removing other alternatives. Women's thoughts and lived experiences show

that the choices a woman makes with regards to an unfaithful partner are dependent on a variety of factors including her environment, her wider relationships and her feelings and desires as well as gendered cultural expectations. Her choices can, therefore, be seen as an expression of her situated moral agency. Understandings of young Rarotongan women's situated moral agency go beyond terms of "subversion or resignification of social norms" (Mahmood, 2005, p. 14). The normative forces of societal gender ideals and family's expectations as well as a young woman's own desires and motivations intersect producing different notions of what a young woman conceives of as both a desirable and plausible response to the situation they live in.

Infidelity in Rarotongan society

Surprisingly, despite its worldwide presence, infidelity including the beliefs, emotions and behaviour associated with it as well as individuals agentic response to an unfaithful partner is not a topic often discussed in anthropological studies (Keefe; 2019; Macaуда et al., 2011; Hirsch et al., 2009; Jankowiak et al., 2002). In international and public health publications, infidelity research has taken an important stance due to its implications for the distribution of transmitted diseases such as chlamydia, syphilis and foremost HIV (e.g. Boyce et al., 2016; Cordero-Coma, 2013; Eyre et al., 2011; Parikh, 2007; Hirsch et al., 2007; Lary et al. 2004). Clinical and counselling literature focuses on the effects of infidelity in the lives of women and men to improve the support and coping strategies counsellors and therapists can offer to the involved parties (Warach and Josephs, 2019; O'Connor and Canevello; 2019; Scuka, 2015; Heintzelman et al., 2014; Piercy, Hertlein and Wetchler, 2011 [2005]; Brown 2001).

In the majority of countries, infidelity and the response to it is a highly gendered social and moral issue (Keefe, 2019; Macaуда et al., 2011). However, little is known about how fidelity is established and negotiated within contemporary Rarotongan partner

relationships, which strategies young women use to prevent infidelity and how they deal with and negotiate unfaithfulness. Daniel Jordan Smith (2010), in his analysis of young Nigerian women's responses to infidelity, argues that unmarried women can and commonly do leave their unfaithful partners because, unlike in marriage, women face no or only little social consequence of doing so. Yet, being married and having children is the locus of southeastern Nigerian adult female identity. Achieving and preserving this status is of main importance to women. Some women, therefore, will tolerate an unfaithful partner as long as he plays a socially respectable and gender-appropriate role in raising the family (Smith, 2010). In Tanzania, Susi Keefe (2019) argues women's acceptance of their husbands' affairs has nothing to do with women's subordination, rather some women actively chose affairs to avoid polygyny. Polygyny, as Keefe demonstrates, is rejected by women for economic and emotional reasons, and an often-named consequence of polygyny is divorce.

In Rarotonga, polygyny is prohibited since the arrival of Christianity in 1823. Until 27 November 1970⁴⁴, adultery committed by married persons or with a married woman has also been forbidden and punished.⁴⁵ Supportively, Christian belief and teaching inveigh against the sin of polygyny and adultery. Similarly, local myths and songs recount stories of warriors who take another man's wife through guile or seduction usually resulting in a fight or war where either one or both men die (see for example Siikala, 1991; Gill, 1984 [1894]). A few tales also indicate a woman's response to and the serious consequences of a man's unfaithfulness. Rev. William Wyatt Gill (1984 [1894], p. 88-98), for example, recorded a song composed circa A.D. 1674 concerning eleven warriors hiding in a cave after a defeat. Inangaro, the leader, pretended love for a

⁴⁴ <http://www.legislation.govt.nz/act/public/1915/0040/latest/whole.html#DLM183073>

⁴⁵ Cook Islands Act 1915, §200 Every married person who commits adultery shall be liable to a fine of ten pounds. Cook Islands Act 1915, §201 Every man who commits adultery with a woman whom he knows to be married shall be liable to a fine of ten pounds.

woman called Inaango from the opposing tribe to secure provisioning but he actually fell in love with Kurauri, another woman of Inaango's tribe, who brought food to his younger brother. The younger brother deferred to his elder sibling and a love affair between Inangaro and Kurauri developed. The affair came to a tragic end when Inaango found out about the betrayal. Jealous and in rage she revealed the hiding spot of the fugitives to the head of her clan. All the fugitives were killed. At the same time, overseas movies and television shows using an affair as the main story line are watched with great amusement and women heavily comment on the behaviour of the different actors. The Cook Islands legal framework, Christian faith, local tales, myths, songs and inhabitants' reactions to overseas movies convey a sense of infidelity as culturally unacceptable. Historical and contemporary evidence throughout the Cook Islands and Polynesia more generally indicates that infidelity, by both men and women, plays a major role in intimate partner relationships (Williams, 1984 [1830 & 1832]; Shore, 1982; Ortner, 1981; Huntsman and Hooper, 1976; Oliver, 1974; Levy, 1973; Marshall, 1971; Goldman, 1970).

Ernest Beaglehole (1957, p. 179), for example, argues that marriage in Aitutaki in the 1950s "is characterized by a patterned lack of faithfulness [... and] accompanied by much jealousy. If men wander to women because of a desire for novelty, then wives will often be unfaithful in order to spite a wandering husband or to teach him a lesson". A few sentences later he named infidelity as a major reason for divorce (Beaglehole, 1957, p. 179). Jean T. Mason (2003b, p. 234) states that in pre-Christian times "[m]arriage did not include a promise of fidelity for life – such a concept being unknown to Polynesia". In line with this and in accordance with her observation that nowadays couples often remain together in spite of the fact that either one or both have children to another partner during the marriage, Mason (2003b) concludes that this idea has been preserved.

Missionaries and scholarly writings about pre-Christian Polynesia indicate a gendered dimension with regard to infidelity pointing out that sexual fidelity was demanded of married women at all levels of society (Firth, 2011 [1936]; Oliver, 1974; Sahlins, 1958; Gifford, 1929; Best 1924). According to William H. Davenport (1977) and Douglas L. Oliver (1989) two standards have been applied -- one for common women and one for women of rank. Securing the purity of the genealogical line, the daughter of a high chief was regarded as high ranking and sacred. Her virginity was guarded and her sexual activities controlled by rules against premarital and extramarital sex until she had given birth to at least one successor. The restrictions on extramarital sex for common women were less severe (Oliver, 1989; Davenport, 1977). Several accounts throughout the area, however, describe the intense emotionally outbursts of jealous men and the serious consequences for unfaithful women and their presumed lovers. In the Marquesas, jealous husbands would beat or kill their wives, her lover or both (Suggs, 1966; Handy, 1923). The same has been reported for the indigenous population of Aotearoa (New Zealand). Elsdon Best (1924, p. 474-475) writes:

Occasionally a man would discard an adulterous wife, or expose her on a path spread-eagled, with her limbs pegged down or compose and sing a song reviling her.

In Samoa, George Turner (2004 [1884]), a missionary from the LMS, notes that an adulterer was sometimes physically punished through the loss of an eye, ear or nose. Bradd Shore (1982) states especially in cases where a chief was involved, murder and adultery were punishable by death in Samoa. For this reason, he (1982, p. 114, *italics* in original) continues:

A murderer or adulterer and his *'āiga* were often quick to absent themselves from the village, seeking refuge among distant kin in another part of the island or archipelago.

In Mangaia (Cook Islands), the usual punishment for adultery was the confiscation of movable goods from a lover's property by the husband's family. After the raid, the lover "was left with a bare hut and bare land. The food supplies were so drastically dealt with that the punishment was keenly felt" (Buck, 1971a [1934], p. 154). A more severe punishment was the confiscation of a lover's land or his death (Buck, 1971a [1934]). If and how an unfaithful husband has been punished or if his wife has received a customary redress has not been reported. Buck (1971a [1934], p. 154) reasons "[women] seem usually to have vented their wrath in words and returned to the homes of their parents".

While missionaries banned all forms of capital punishment, physical abuse and torture, inhabitants were left with the power to publicly humiliate and finally banish a woman, her lover and their families (Shore, 1982). Ortner (1981, p. 389) argues that men's intense jealous outbursts had less to do with a man's emotional attachment to his wife, because the emotional bond between husband and wife was "weak". Moreover, a wife's infidelity was perceived as an offense against the husband's pride and his prestigious status and this was the reason for these intense emotional reactions (Ortner, 1981).

What stands out from these sources is the 'normalisation' and easiness with which particularly women supposedly deal with infidelity. The emotional impact of infidelity on women as well as the strategies they use to deal with infidelity and its mostly accompanying feelings are seldom mentioned in these accounts. One exception is Edward Smith Craighill Handy's (1923) *The Native Culture in the Marquesas*. Handy (1923, p. 100, *italics in original*) writes:

If a woman were [sic] overwhelmed with sorrow and jealousy on account of the unfaithfulness of a man, it does appear that she would attempt to revenge herself either on the other woman or on her husband, but rather that her grief would lead to suicide by taking poison or hanging herself. ... [W]omen sometimes followed this course with the intention of returning

after death as *vehine hae*, or evil spirits, to haunt the surviving husband and his new wife

This account shows that in practice, a partner's infidelity has always triggered a whole set of emotions, feelings and responses in women. In contemporary Rarotonga, young women carefully integrate their emotions when they evaluate their options; make conscious decisions about what to do and they choose and develop strategies to respond to an unfaithful partner. The majority of women do not see themselves subservient to a partner's behaviour nor do they ignore or condone their partner's sexual encounters. Indeed, they actively engage with and manage their partner's infidelity.

Double standard -- casual sexual contacts vs. stable partner relationships

In Rarotongan society, stable intimate relationships, including marriage, are valued but permeated by a gendered ambivalence regarding sexuality and what a stable intimate partner relationship should look like. Infidelity is frowned upon particularly for women while it is often described as anticipated behaviour of men (see also Crocombe and Holmes, 2014b). During socialization, young men are encouraged to be sexually active and to gain sexual knowledge and experience whereas young women should restrain sexual activities and desires to avoid the negative connotation of being interpreted as promiscuous or sexually experienced (see Futter-Puati, 2017; Alexeyeff 2009b). For this reason, secrecy is of main importance to young women if they are involved in intimate relationships. Youth customarily engaged in secret sexual contacts named *tomo are*. Describing the practice, Kalissa Alexeyeff (2009b, p. 86-87, *italics* in original) refers to the contrasting principles prevailing in Rarotongan society regarding young men's and women's sexual activities:

Many young people are visited by their boyfriend or girlfriend (or someone they have just met) in the night; the practice is called *tomo are* (literally, breaking into the house). Usually (but not exclusively) it is men

who visit women, who in turn may accept or reject the men's advances. On a small island it makes more sense to visit under the cover of darkness than leave a nightclub with a member of the opposite sex. The latter course of action would mean that people would inevitably know what one was up to and with whom. ... To a certain extent, visiting is expected of men; it is a sign of their sexual prowess. Women engaging in the same behaviour are subject to far more intense gossip and negative evaluations of their character.

The direct reference between the engagement of a woman in sexual activities and her character explains why young women engaging in casual sexual contacts stated to be particularly vigilant to hide their affairs from adults, especially from their parents, as long as they did not consider a relationship as serious. Young women cited a myriad of reasons for having only casual sexual contacts. Some women stated they prefer casual sexual contacts because they are uncomplicated and without responsibilities. Another advantage young women expressed is the ease around the rules and expectations which govern appropriate male/ female partner relationships such as a man's nationality or socio-economic status as well as incest rules (see Chapter Three). For 22-year old Poko:

Yeah, it's just us girls here we just seek guys out. We don't know each other. We don't know who he is, to which family he belongs, where he comes from. We just look at each other; we're interested in each other. We just give that signal like [shows me a blink with her eyes and a smile] you know, and then we do it, maybe behind this bar, maybe in the toilet, maybe on the beach. That's it!

24-year old Moana adds:

It should be a person I can talk to. They don't have to let it all in like all the goals and things for just a casual thing. For a casual thing, um, as long as they're nice people, I mean a nice guy, someone good looking and someone I can talk to, um, then yeah that's fine, no restrictions.

In contrast, serious partner relationships are not only framed by rules of who is allowed to be together with whom, they also exist within a net of obligations and responsibilities (see Chapter Three). Consequently, women explained they are very selective of who they choose as stable partner as I will explain in more detail below. The much higher

expectations of a stable partner can be seen as an explanation for why some of my interlocutors stated that they engage in casual sexual contacts but they have not had a stable partner yet. This resonates with Debi Futter-Puati's (2017) findings that being in a stable partner relationship is not an indicator of sexual activity; rather, young people will engage more often in sexual activities outside of a stable relationship. Young women, however, offered also another explanation why they have not had a serious relationship yet; they consistently stated that they are not "ready" for a serious partner relationship. A serious partner relationship, they explained, is a long-term commitment whereas a casual relationship is a temporary arrangement without the obligations, responsibilities and expectations which pattern serious partner relationships including faithfulness.

While officially sanctioned, casual sexual contacts are a prominent part of Rarotongan youth social life (see also Vini, 2003; Alexeyeff, 2009b; Beaglehole and Beaglehole, 1938). Most young women, however, did not like to discuss the topic. When I brought it up, they felt ashamed. Casual sexual contacts are an important aspect of how young women (and I assume, to a different extent, also men) negotiate between their own desires and their families and society's expectations. It offers a possibility to gain knowledge, express individual desires free from parental authority and the expectations and responsibilities of a stable intimate partner relationship. But as Futter-Puati (2017, p. 140) states it is also "a way of deciding if someone is worthy of becoming a partner".

On an overt level, engaging in casual sexual contacts as a woman is seen as a transgressive act. Casual sexual contacts threaten contemporary socio-cultural moral rules and norms such as the expectation of virginity and the sanctity of marriage and serious intimate partner relationships. Nevertheless, they do exist and have their own rules and moral mores. Parents' strict rules with whom their daughters are allowed to be together and when as well as the avoidance of the topic of sexuality sometimes motivate young

women to engage in affairs rather than avoiding them. Young women's acknowledgment of their sexual subjectivity and their agency in initiating, engaging in and sustaining affairs challenge hegemonic socio-historical-cultural ideals of femininity and masculinity, as well as subjectivities of 'good' subservient women and assertive men (Futter-Puati, 2017; Alexeyeff, 2009b). Futter-Puati (2017, p. 147) interprets young women's agency in these situations as a signal that they retained some of the freedom both young men and women possessed in pre-contact, pre-Christian Cook Islands to engage in premarital sexual activities (see also Mason, 2003b; Vini, 2003; Buck, 1971a [1934]; Beaglehole, 1957). While this seems to be a reasonable explanation, I suggest affairs should also be understood as an informal arena, outside of parental authority and control, where young women learn, find out and negotiate what they want, which attributes they value in a partner, while exploring their sexual needs and desires without the responsibilities of a stable intimate partner relationship. In this sense, premarital sexual activities are spaces which shape and are shaped by young women's own needs, beliefs and desires (Mahmood, 2005).

As mentioned above, contrary to casual sexual partners, women are very selective when choosing stable partners. When I asked young women about the values they consider as most important in their serious partner relationships they referred to love, trust, loyalty, kindness, support, respect and, of course, peacefulness and faithfulness. In Chapter Three, these characteristics have been identified as paramount in a family member. Young women expect to express their thoughts and concerns freely and that their opinion on a topic is heard, considered and respected. They wish to make their own choices without being held accountable by their partners for example when they make the decision to go out with their girlfriends, accept a job offer or speak up in a family meeting. They see themselves as the main caretaker of the household and the children but they

expect their partners to share the responsibility by also taking care of the children or to do household work. Finding a partner who is able and willing to share the responsibilities regarding household duties and child rearing becomes more and more important to young Rarotongan women. The majority of young women are highly educated and they engage in paid employment. Having a career, earning their own money and being financially independent from their partners are important aspects of young women's lives and they do not expect that they have to give up their career to be at home looking after the children. At the same time, they also do not expect to become the only breadwinner, as 24-year old Moana explains:

I feel like really independent and for me to have a partner, I kind of wanting him to have what I have - goals. I am working towards something and I am really against someone that would live off me - you know what I mean? I want someone that's, you know, knows what they are doing in their life. A hard worker but also someone that doesn't just work hard but, you know, someone who doesn't forget that he has got a family and I would say a wife. Um, a man who doesn't forget about their partner. I don't know how to say it. I mean you could have a hard worker but this is all they do, they work. They work and, you know, nothing else. I want someone who works hard but also looks after me, pays attention, you know.

Someone who works hard has been named as an important quality in a stable partner by women of all generations. Older women highlighted this aspect explaining that it was and still is seen as a partner's responsibility to provide for the family. For this reason, young women are encouraged by their parents and other family members to choose a partner who embodies this expectation. However, Moana's statement reveals that while young women desire a partner who works hard and contributes financially to the family, it seems at least of equal importance that a man provides for his family and his wife in an emotional and romantic sense. Contemporary young Rarotongan women envision a relationship not for economic reasons or because of physical protection. They want to be seen and sought after. They are looking for faithfulness and romance in their intimate partner

relationships. The ideal partner has to demonstrate constantly that a woman is the only one. In this context, joint activities and dating has been mentioned by my interlocutors as extremely important, as well as gift giving. I often heard young women speaking about the presents they received from their partners. Flowers and chocolate are classic favorites they receive from their partners on special days such as Valentine's Day, birthdays or anniversaries. More often, however, women spoke about the attention they receive from their partners on a daily basis such as their partners bringing them food to their workplace, as 20-year old Nga describes:

He does everything for me like say if I am at work and I text him 'I am hungry' he would like to bring me a steak with rice and mushroom sauce. He would bring it for lunch.

I observed this practice on a nearly daily basis during lunchtime among women I worked with. Husbands or partners stopped in front of the women's workplace, entered the building with a plate of food or handed the plate over to their partner through a window before returning to their own workplaces. The whole process took only two or three minutes. During this time, the couple will ask each other how work is and confirm a pickup time or arrange to see each other at home at a certain time in the evening. After the partner had left, women would proudly present the food to their colleagues telling them with a broad smile on their face and light in their eyes that their partner has brought food which is commonly shared among them.

Whenever women have time during work or meet friends outside of work, they will talk about the unexpected presents they received from their partners or when they have been surprisingly taken out to dinner after work or at the weekend. Women explain in great detail what happened, how he has presented the gift or how he has taken them out to dinner. The partners' behaviour, a woman's reactions and feelings as well as the restaurant, the waitress and the food are discussed.

Receiving attention and being desired by their partner is important to women of all age groups. It is important that their partners are seen by others when they bring gifts and shower attention on their wives or partners. In Rarotongan society, this public demonstration of affection and care mirrors the quality of a relationship suggesting that the relationship is solid, affectionate and harmonious. If a woman's partner is paying attention and shows desire for his partner in everyday life it is also assumed that the relationship is monogamous. On the other hand, the status of a relationship may be questioned if this display of affection does not take place. Intimate partner relationships are a social endeavor whereby women not only negotiate their partner relationship but they must also be concerned with the outward public representation of it by their husbands or partners to their families and the wider community. The tension can play out in a powerful way if young women must find ways to deal with an unfaithful partner.

'He can do that because he is a man' -- infidelity and society's gender expectations

In Rarotonga, both men and women engage in affairs outside their primary relationships, however, the social response differs according to gender.⁴⁶ If the straying partner is a woman people will denunciate her by questioning her character and morals as well as criticizing her womanhood; whereas because men are expected to have affairs, they will not be condemned by the community and they may, in fact, add to their standing among their peer group. That young men 'sleep around' with a variety of women was a common topic of conversation, gossip and joking among older women whereas young women expressed their annoyance towards this aspect of men's behaviour. I was also frequently teased by women of all age groups about whether I was in Rarotonga to find a

⁴⁶ Debi Futter-Puati (2017, p. 141) in her study of Rarotongan youth knowledge and experiences of sexuality found (without providing detailed numbers for male and female) that twenty per cent of her 674 participants aged between 15 and 24 engaged in sexual contacts outside of a stable relationship.

stable partner.⁴⁷ Indeed, I was approached several times by young men. That I was already in a serious relationship did not matter. Men explained to me that my partner did not need to find out or they asked provocatively “Is he here? No! So, there is nothing to worry about”. The most intense approach I experienced after having been on the island for two months during my first fieldwork trip. I spent the afternoon together with a female friend in a popular bar. Later on, a young man approached us and my friend introduced him to me and he joined us. When twilight approached, I decided to go home. The young man was very quick to offer me a ride. The warnings from the young woman I met on the plane (see Chapter One), from other friends and particularly older women in mind, I declined with the words “I will be fine” and left. Not long after I started walking, a motorbike was fast approaching and stopped close to me. It was the young man from the bar and he offered again to take me home. I repeated that I did not need a ride and added that I was nearly there but he insisted. I yielded and he dropped me off. I thanked him and entered the house. A few minutes later I received a text “Hey Aniah, do you want to sleep at my place?” I answered “No, thank you. Enjoy your evening”. He replied “Can I sleep with you plz”. Confused and surprised by this direct approach I wrote him “No, I have a boyfriend”. He just responded “and?” I decided not to answer and some time later I heard him starting his motorbike and driving away. When I shared my experience with women of all age groups they burst out in laughter and some asked why I had not engaged in sexual relations with him explaining that it would have been a valuable experience for me.⁴⁸ Other women used my story as an opportunity to express their dissatisfaction with

⁴⁷ In the beginning I found this question strange and just answered no, I am in a serious relationship. Later on, I learned that it was more to this question than just a joke. It was also an expression of fear. 34-year old Elenoa comes from Fiji. She told me that she was not perceived well in the community when she moved to Rarotonga with her Rarotongan husband. Women constantly showed her their dissatisfaction and disapproval. The reason for the community’s behaviour, she said, was that there are not a lot ‘good’ men in Rarotonga and she had married one of them.

⁴⁸ I gave them the same answer I gave this young man and others “I am in a serious relationship”. In a lot of eyes my partner was not a ‘good’ man. His qualities were always questioned because he had sent me alone to the island without securing my protection and he also did not visit me. That coming here was

this young man's behaviour in particular and more generally about young men and their approaches. 22-year old Poko for example elevated her voice and said indignantly:

They are animals. They just say something so stupid to me like 'How about it, let's go' you know, have sex and I am 'the hell no, what do you think I am. Am I a prostitute to you?' We are not prostitutes!

Regardless of their initial reaction to my experience, women of all age groups expressed their frustration with society's different understanding and standards between men and women with regards to infidelity. It indicates differences in gendered subjectivities, experiences and moralities when it comes to multiple relationships. 29-year old Ina's statement puts it succinctly:

They [men] do that a lot over here, it is expected sort of a thing. Some males just sleeping with whoever they want and it's regarded as 'oh yeah, they are cool'. But then a female does that and then she immediately is like a slut. That's pretty bad. Me and my sister have conversations about how annoying that is. It's so unfair that even there are two people in a relationship, um, the man can, you know, do all this sort of stuff and it's just kind of, like, normalized, like, all well. Yeah, they tend to do that a lot more when the lady is caring or when you are a bit shyer. They say 'that's fine'. That is expected sort of thing but if a woman would do that for instance it's just like 'wow'. It's a break loose what this woman committed that it was bad. Uh, it is bad, really really bad, and kind of like a social stigma against her.

The 'normalisation' of men's non-monogamous, unfaithful behaviour strongly contrasts young women's expectations of a stable intimate partner relationship and their often-expressed desire of monogamous love relationships. Having said this, it is important to remember that I do not want to say that only men engage in multiple relationships. None of my female interlocutors admitted that they had engaged in sexual relations outside of a stable partnership, but they, of course, were motivated to present

my choice, that we are in a close contact every day and that he is working and therefore supporting me emotionally and financially were not considered reasonable explanations for my partner's absence.

themselves and their behaviour in a positive light. Nevertheless, they told stories about both men and women who were unfaithful to their partners. 32-year old Mere commented:

My people are giving it away for free. My people are so very giving I register, yeah. Sexual relationships are very fluid. It's a lot of sharing. I have friends who sleep around and we all know it. There are not many relationships that I know of that have lasted. My husband and I are probably one of very few in our circle of friends. ... We're just not those people. I am not because I don't have a high sex charger, you know. You don't need to go sleeping around with the men. It doesn't interest me. In fact it's bloody boring. Why would you want to do it? It's so hard to keep one relationship. Why would you want to start another one? And then you have to juggle two. One is hard enough.

The ideal, young people were taught during socialization by their parents and the church is that their serious relationships have to be monogamous, especially if there are children involved. As stated above, women's non-compliance with this rule has serious consequences. Debi Futter-Puati (2017) concludes, with regards to men, that their engagement in multiple sexual relationships defies parental and religious expectations of monogamous relationships, but in practice the cultural 'normalisation' of their sexual promiscuity seems to be stronger than parental and religious teachings of monogamy.⁴⁹ Futter-Puati (2017) also emphasised another important point, namely that parental behaviour does not always conform to these teachings. Futter-Puati (2017, p. 190) argues that parental non-compliance to this norm conveys the perception to young people that multiple sexual relationships "hidden behind the façade of a public monogamous relationship, are normalized in [Cook Islands] culture". My interlocutors often attested to having witnessed the consequences of infidelity within the relationship of their parents or

⁴⁹ In pre-Christian Rarotonga polygyny was common governed only by the principle that a man could economically support and physically protect his wives and children. Upon their arrival, missionaries were appalled by this situation and insisted on monogamy. Laws forbidding the immoral and sinful behaviour of polygyny and adultery were passed but missionaries faced many problems enforcing the laws (Ama, 2003; Williams, 1998 [1837]). For this reason they introduced the 'Church law' according to which only men and women married in church could become accepted members of the church (Henry, 2003). It seems likely that affairs hidden behind a stable monogamous relationship became a common method to bypass the laws. These affairs were now governed by the rule of secrecy but considered culturally normalized.

other family members. Foremost they highlighted the pain it induced mostly on the side of female family members. 20-year old Vaine comments:

I have seen my mother. She tried to hide it from us [children] but we heard them [parents] argue and her eyes were red all the time. It went on for a long time. Then the arguments stopped. I guess my mother was tired but she still cried very often. My father's behaviour broke her. I am not doing this to my partner and I also do not want him to do that to me.

Having seen their mothers or aunties suffer, often multiple times, is one of the main reasons why young women do not wish to have multiple sexual contacts. Another often named reason is that young women have experienced these painful feelings on their own and do not want to impose them on their partners, as 32-year old Mere notes:

I am not that person who would do that to my husband, um, because I have had it done to me and I don't like that feeling and so, yes, for me I would never want someone else to go that way.

According to my interlocutors, women desire monogamous relationships not simply because of the threatened social stigmatization, but also because of fear of the negative emotions which frequently accompany infidelity. Having experienced the feelings inflicted by infidelity or having seen a close family member suffer emotional hardship due to an unfaithful partner, young women often choose to push against the 'normalization' of multiple sexual contacts in Rarotongan society.

Infidelity and ending a relationship

It can be argued that infidelity, men's normalised desire for it and the fear, pain and frustration it incites in women have real consequences in contemporary Rarotonga as it is one if not even the most frequent reason triggering thoughts in women to leave a relationship. In fact, unfaithfulness has been named as the main motive for divorce in Polynesia and the wider Pacific (Bolin, 2004; Strathern, 1972; Beaglehole, 1957). Scholars and missionaries previously working in Polynesia reported that in the past

women had few options after a relationship ended or they had gone through a divorce -- they could remarry or return to their parents (Firth, 2011 [1936], Bolin, 2004; Shankman, 2001; Ortner 1981; Buck, 1971a [1934]; Handy, 1923). The same options applied to Rarotongan women. The latter option was only possible if the woman's family owned land in Rarotonga or had enough space for their daughter to return. In general, older women told me that returning to the parents was not an option because of the moral stigma attached to divorce. For this reason, most divorced women remarried immediately, as 32-year old Mere explains citing the example of her grandmother:

My grandmother in those days when she was married the first time her husband left her because he wanted to go with some other woman. She depended on him heavily for income. So there were those very traditional roles of he was the worker and she was the homemaker. When he left her, she was stuck with three children, no income, nowhere to go, no skills. So she got married again because she was stuck. She had no job prospects. She was a woman. During those times you didn't work you just stayed home and named children.

In pre-Christian Rarotonga, cohabitation or living together with a partner in a serious intimate partner relationship constituted marriage between commoners. These marriages were broken if one partner moved out of the household and started living with somebody else (Beaglehole, 1957). Christian missionaries found this situation appalling and insisted on a marriage ceremony practiced in church to establish a more binding form of commitment. Older women told me that in the 1960s and 1970s, parents and the wider community pushed young women into marriage when they discovered a young woman's involvement with a man. Others told me that they used marriage as a method to escape an overcrowded or abusive parental household (see also Mason, 2003b). Today, from the perspective of young women, Christian marriage is perceived as a voluntary sacred social institution whose significance for a woman's moral projects of becoming and self-formation, except in deeply Christian families, has faded and more couples live together

in defacto relationships (see Ama, 2003). The societal moral stigma attached to couples living together in defacto relationships has weakened, indicating a turn back to pre-Christian local marriage practices. In a defacto relationship, one partner moving out of the shared household signals the end of a relationship. Divorce is dealt with in court but it also includes informal negotiations and mediations involving the couple, their families and communities. 29-year old Ina depicts:

I think there would be a lot of people saying why didn't they work it out sort of thing, um, especially if you are in church and stuff elders would get involved and ensure that you are doing everything possible that your marriage stays intact. Uh, and counseling, with the, you know, church people and all of that sort of stuff to ensure that you did receive advice. For other people, you know, who don't go to church so much, it's just more like an embarrassment more so they would be quite sad that it did not work out. Most people in society would and the community here would know why they were divorced actually because it's such a small community like I said and mostly it would be big due to a relationship really failing like them [parents] doing extreme things and saying 'oh, ok we have seen that coming anyway'. It's hard because you have both families, you know, the husband's and wife's families being quite specific. When there are kids involved then that becomes a little bit messy.

A couple's parents are thought to be particularly persistent about the couple staying together if there are children involved. I heard a lot of stories where solid relationships between a woman's and a man's families turned to the opposite because of their battle for the couple's children.

In her study of Hawaiian women, Patricia Grimshaw (1989, p. 30) argues that after the adoption of Christianity, divorce was permitted "only in the case of adultery or willful desertion where mediation had failed". In Rarotonga, Beaglehole (1957, p. 179) points out that "[w]hen married couples find more frustration than satisfaction in marriage, a break will readily occur, all the more readily because no stigma, beyond mild disapproval at the most, is attached to those who fail to make a success of marriage". While this may certainly be true for some women, as Ina indicated, for others, particularly

those with families strongly involved in a Christian church or with a high standing in the community, it seems very unlikely that a divorce will have no social consequences. 28-year old Mereani's statement supports the assumption that the position a family holds in the community and the church heavily influences not only the choices available to young women when they experience problems within their relationship, but also the consequences if they would choose divorce:

I've heard some silly remarks by families that are quite church strong, you know, they hold like certain standing in the community. So, they're always keeping up their image but the ones that aren't so, they don't have any title, they don't have any community title or sports title or political title or church title that they have to approach to than they're less likely to impose those kind of like restrictions on women of behaving and staying with the husband. But if you are involved in church and you get divorced exclusion is highly likely.

When I asked elderly Rarotongan women about their intimate partner relationships and about infidelity, I was told numerous personal stories of pain, fear and anger, but also about how they were expected to deal with these situations by their families and the communities they lived in. Women commonly explained that Christian belief strongly disapproves of divorce because of the promise a couple made to God during the marriage ceremony.

I thought about it [divorce] but I couldn't do it. Marriage for me is a commitment which I will not give up lightly. Women who get divorced don't believe strong enough in the Lord. It's a commitment between you, the man and the Lord. (65-year old woman)

A number of elderly women, however, confessed that they would have left their partner if it would have been approved by their family and their community and if they would not have been heavily criticized and sanctioned for doing so.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ Meeting with a group of women between 50 and 80 years old on 18 April 2018.

You know, women did not get divorced here because of their standing in the community. We would have been excluded from the church even if the man's behaviour is unbearable. Even today, it is still considered bad. They say that you did not try enough. You did not put enough work and faith in it.

Women of all age groups emphasized that even today they are supposed to “work their relationship issues out” to maintain the picture in front of the wider society that the relationships within the family are good and harmonious. This seems even more important to women who entered a relationship or marriage without their parents' approval.

They have been warned before and they don't want anybody to think that they picked the wrong guy. That something is not ok. That their lives are not in harmony.⁵¹

In Chapter Two, I argued that those primarily responsible for upholding harmonious family relationships are women and that a woman's moralities are mirrored through her behaviour and the quality of her family relationships. A divorce is considered a public demonstration of a woman's failure and her moralities may be questioned. If a woman entered a relationship without her parents' approval, these judgments reach a more severe dimension. A woman not only has to address the consequences of a divorce, but she also has to deal with the embarrassment and shame and that she jeopardized her relationships with her family members for the “wrong guy”. A divorce or separation is proof that she failed as a ‘good’ woman in a twofold way; she was neither able to maintain a harmonious relationship with her family of origin nor with her partner.

Negotiating fidelity

To the same degree as domestic violence, infidelity is the most frequent explanation given by young women about why they would consider ending a relationship.

⁵¹ Meeting with a group of women between 50 and 80 years old on 18 April 2018.

As I have shown above, ending a relationship can have devastating consequences for a woman's standing in her family and her community as well as for her moral projects of becoming and self-formation. For this reason, young Rarotongan women employ a variety of strategies to secure fidelity in their serious intimate partner relationships. 32-year old Mere, for example, spoke to her partner about unfaithfulness and her preference for a monogamous intimate partner directly in the beginning of their relationship:

In the earlier stages of our relationship it was like, you know, 'if you ever wanted to than go', you know, 'but don't come back! Realise it, that's the end of this!' Yeah, so and he was like 'why would I want two wives. One, trying to keep one is hard enough' and I was like 'ok, well, thanks, great' [laughter].

20-year old Vaine pays great attention to her physical appearance in public and in private in order to continue to appear attractive to her partner to ensure his fidelity in the relationship:

I always try to look good when we go out and at home. This is very important that you are good looking also at home! I use makeup, style my hair and wear modern, sexy clothes. A lot of women don't do that, they wear comfortable clothes [at home]. It's definitely easier to do your chores [laughter] but then they're wondering why their partners look after other women. I think when I show him what he has, a good looking, sexy woman, why should he look for another?

24-year old Apii offered another tactic to prevent infidelity in her intimate partner relationship. She and her partner communicate openly about people they find attractive. This provides the basis for later discussions where both are able to convey their desires while at the same time reassuring their loyalty to their partner:

We are open about, you know, if I see a nice looking man pass me I maybe 'oh, he is hot' and my partner would just laugh it off and he will do the same and I would just laugh it off. But sometimes one of us gets jealous and we argue and [it] all starts coming up and then we talk about it in more detail which is good. We laugh about it afterwards. But he is loyal to me as much as I am loyal to him.

When I asked Apii what she would do if, despite her efforts, she finds out her partner engaged in sexual contacts outside of their relationship she said:

I probably leave him or no better I will send him back [overseas] [laughter]. [Turning serious she said] I would run to my mom first. I will talk about it to my friends too and it's less uncomfortable but I rather get advice from my mom. My mom's being through a lot. She might have the best advice. ... If he would do this now, before our marriage, I would know why my parents give me a hard time to approve of him.

Apii's statement highlights the important role parents play in young women's lives and decision-making processes. Particularly mothers are considered as a source of advice if problems occur even if it is perceived as "uncomfortable" by young women to address their intimate relationships in conversations with their parents. Usually women do not speak about their problems, not only because they do not want to endanger their harmonious family status, but also because they do not want their issues to be the topic of conversations by the whole community. Speaking with their own family members, usually mothers, has been named by most of my interlocutors as the best way to receive confidential advice and support if they experience difficulties within their partner relationships. Seeking help from outside seems even less likely if young women have failed to comply with normative societal expectations of gender specific norm-conforming behaviour in the past.

Apii also indicated that if parents have approved of their daughter's serious partner relationship, young women do not, alone, hold the responsibility that they might have chosen the wrong partner. Trusting her parents' advice in the same way she does by waiting for their marriage approval (see Chapter Three) and certain of their support if she experiences problems, Apii confidently stated that, in accord with her parents, she would "probably" leave her partner if he was unfaithful. For 23-year old Kaua the situation is different:

Cheating is a big no, no. I will just walk of, absolutely walk out but then again, you know, they would say ‘ah, just give him a chance’ and that. But I mean it’s easier said than to be done, you know. So if he did that to me I wouldn’t even know. I mean for me just to leave suddenly after all the years, you know, after all what we’ve been through. But then just for him to do that it would break me. To be honest I wouldn’t even know, I wouldn’t really know what to do.

In the same way as Apii, Kaua’s direct and confident reaction was that she would leave her partner if he would betray her trust in their relationship. More obvious than Apii whose doubts are only visible in the word “probably”, Kaua hesitated and considered her relationship history. Kaua moved in with her partner without the approval of her parents. This led to a distancing between them and left her fully dependent on her partner when she was 19-years old. Due to her pregnancy, her parents made the decision, in the best interest of the child, to reconcile with their daughter and to encourage her to marry her partner (see Chapter Four). It is important to keep in mind that Kaua’s parents are strong members of a Christian church which she named as reason why she would probably not discuss her relationship problems with her parents:

We being brought up we have always been taught so many times and, um, our discipline was one of our main focus within the family. Discipline and respect and there were times when we do sidetrack and when we go and ask our parents for advice, you know, they would, um, but we will think like no we can’t do that because it’s against our religion. It’s against our belief. I think that is one of the reasons why, no wait I don’t think, it is one of the reasons why I don’t open up to them much.

While both Apii and Kaua spoke hypothetically about what they would do if they found out that their partner was unfaithful, 29-year old Ina and 30-year old Teroro have experienced infidelity in their intimate partner relationships. In the remaining part of this chapter, I will tell their stories to further highlight that the development of young women’s multiple agencies goes beyond dualistic categories of individual autonomy or acts of resistance to socio-historical-cultural norms, values and structures (Mahmood, 2005).

Ina's story -- "You leave them on two conditions"

Ina: Going into relationships my grandmother had said that when you are into a relationship with someone, with males, you leave them on two conditions: if they cheat on you or if they hit you. So, that's, I don't know, it always stuck with me. That's why I am not with my son's father.

Anja: What happened?

Ina: He cheated on me.

Anja: How did you find out?

Ina: Um, through a friend of mine because Cook Islanders is a very small community even those living in New Zealand and he is a New Zealand born Cook Islander. Because it's a lot of Cook Islanders living there and he happened to cheat on me with a girl who is a Cook Islander. Who is related to one of my really close friends. So, she disclosed this to her. I was here at the time and she was also in Raro and he was in New Zealand and she found me and told me. That's how small this island is [laughter].

Anja: Was it hard for you to end this relationship?

Ina: Uh, yeah. Yes, it was tough. ... It was very very difficult because we had spent like 5 years together and also we had a son together. So that was really hard. It is not like it's a clean I don't want to see you anymore and I don't have to see you anymore sort of thing. Uh, that would be difficult on this island anyway but luckily he lived in New Zealand [laughter] so that was fine.

[Turning serious] It was, very, very difficult because we have a child together. So, it wasn't a good split in the beginning, um, but now it is. My son goes there every school holiday to spent time with his dad. We will always have to communicate because of him. I had to overcome the hurt. Um, mostly for me to overcome, that motivation to overcome the pain was because of my son because I wanted him to have a ground and solid upbringing with both of us and because he already knew his father. You know, it's not like he was a baby where he doesn't know dad at all. He knows him, so. I can't just, you know, put him apart from his father and I had really to try to remove my emotions and say, I am doing this for him.

29-year old Ina grew up in Rarotonga. Her mother is of Cook Island and New Zealand Māori descent and her biological father, whom she does not know, comes from another Polynesian island. She was raised by her grandparents until she was 13-years old. From this time on she lived with her mother and stepfather in several different countries

around the world and eventually New Zealand where she finished school and met her partner. Together with him and her newborn son, she moved back to Rarotonga when she was 19-years old. Her parents offered them the possibility to stay in the family house while living overseas. Some of her siblings also live in Rarotonga. Ina considers her upbringing as different to a lot of the young people and she described her time living abroad as an eye opener. She begins and ends her day with a prayer and she tries to pray every time before she eats. She says her Christian belief shapes the way she interacts with people and how she sees things, but sometimes this conflicts with the perspectives she gained from her life overseas. The role her family plays in her life is very influential. She points out:

When I am going through a challenging time or a situation that I can't quite figure out myself, I will go to my family and discuss it over them and, you know, they are very influential in, um, how I approach these situations. ... I will take all of their opinions into considerations but at the end of the day I know the decision is mine and mine alone because I have to live with the decision at the end. ... But generally, I would go with what they say because what they say is generally what I want.

When Ina found out her partner betrayed her, she was hurt and emotionally broken. She knew that she had to make a decision which would not only affect her but also their son. The main voice in her head when she considered what she should do and how to react to her partner's unfaithfulness was her grandmother's, saying that she should leave a relationship with a partner who betrayed her. This encouraged Ina to do so. Her grandmother's words reassured her that she was doing the right thing and that her family would support her decision. Living in her own family house and her high education enabled Ina to financially provide for herself and her son independently from her partner. Another important point is that her partner moved back to New Zealand. This had two advantages for Ina. First the separation happened more in private and not in front of the

whole community.⁵² Second and more importantly for Ina, she did not have to see him which helped her to deal with the emotional distress his behaviour and the end of her intimate partner relationship caused her.

As with many young women, Ina sought advice and solace from her family members. She evaluated and negotiated her own needs and desires with social and family expectations and chose to leave her partner in cooperation with them. Ina contested local moral norms by acting against ideal perceptions of 'good' womanhood, namely upholding harmonious relationships, but she did so within the parameters of 'good' womanhood by having her family's approval. She pursued her own goal, namely having a monogamous intimate partner relationship, while considering the needs and perspectives of others. Having found a solution in cooperation with her family members which complies with her wishes and desires eases much of the burden the ending of her relationship caused her and supported her to move on in her striving towards living a moral life.

Teroro's story -- "I will just be your fiancée"

Contrary to Ina, Teroro grew up with her parents. She has two older and a younger brother and is the only female child. She has lived her whole life in Rarotonga and her upbringing was influenced by her parent's strong involvement in a Christian church. Her parent's had huge expectations of her and expected that she would follow their religious steps. However, Teroro decided not to follow her parent's role model and 'broke away' from the Christian path:

Teroro: I wanted to try something different. I wanted to, um, have a taste of life and not be in church every Sunday. I wanted to just go out all weekend and just get drunk or do any like or do all of that. Then I married somebody, uh, I met somebody and I married him who's in that, like my husband drinks and smokes and not like the sort of lifestyle that I wanted

⁵² I do not assume that nobody talked about the breakup but the gossip stopped probably sooner as there is less information available.

to live in when I was younger but it's the person that I chose that I wanted to spend the rest of my life with and that's where I am now. At first I was enjoying it. I thought like this is what I wanted to do like I wanted to be, just like everybody in the movies where everybody breaks away and like you just become rebellious and stuff. I wasn't sorry like, you know, you watch something in the movies when you're growing up, all the western influences and that's where you want to go and then I had a taste of it and sometimes I wish I never had a taste of it, but how was I supposed to learn like if I never got a taste of any of that.

Anja: What happened?

Teroro: Obviously my parents, um, the relationship to my parents broke but when I was carrying my son, I am just gonna say my husband was very promiscuous. He was cheating a lot on me. I knew but I never excepted it like I knew he was doing it, but I didn't think he was gonna do it, you know, because my whole life revolved around him at that time and I was carrying his firstborn or hopefully it was his firstborn, but like I was carrying his firstborn and he would do that like I never believed that I was just so like love drunk on this particular guy and then I was going through labor, I got my son and he asked me to marry him. It was crazy. He asked me to marry him why I was going through labor - silly! And I said, I was lying, 'I will just be your fiancée'. I needed time. He apologized for mucking around and stuff and then I got pregnant with my daughter and it didn't stop like it was continuously going! He was still doing that and I was hurt even more. Um, but I think what hurt me more was that I was still living under his roof, still with him even though I knew he was still doing those things to me and my son. Me being pregnant and hormonal, there was a lot of rage. I didn't know if I am gonna set a break but I hung in there. I decided to stay with him because I loved him. He was my first for everything. I lost my virginity to him. He is the father of my children and, um, the only one I had [tears]. I didn't know where else I should go. I saw it as he just got me pregnant and then left me at home and went into drinking. But not long I've gonna had my daughter and he had calmed down. So, after I gave birth to our girl, um, he just stayed home like he didn't go out drinking and if he did go out to rugby, for example, we would all have to follow. I didn't come up with the idea. He had come up with the idea and I don't know if it was because he had a daughter or if something else changed. I don't know what happened but after our daughter was born everything just changed like he became more involved in like the upbringing of his children, um, paid more attention to me. I really got attention like I started to fall back in love with the guy that caught me from the beginning! And then just randomly, um, he asked if I would still want to marry him and I said 'oh, well I do think about it'. He knows I've had these years in mind when I was carrying my son and my

daughter and I was watching him break my heart so often and then he might say he's not gonna do it again but you still doing it. So, I waited a bit longer and then he asked me again and, um, I came up with this idea so I had like two A4 papers one for me and one for him and then, um, we've done this thing where I write down all the things that I am seeing with him and he would do the same and then we will discuss it and will flip it over and do like all the things that I didn't see like all the bad things about him that I didn't like. I had too much. I mean I was hurt. I had so much things to write down. I had so much hate. I even wrote down things like 'you never gave me your ear to like listen to me' and I had tears, a lot of tears. And, then, about a month after that I said yes that I would marry him and I would say I am actually happy!

Anja: Have you had somebody to talk to?

Teroro: At the time I was just like I've got nobody. I never had that support. I never had like friends to talk to about anything like now I've ended up here [organization name] when I've got nobody else to talk to, yeah, that's where I am heading. So, after I gave birth to my son, I got involved here [organization name] and then I just made this whole big circle of friends and that's it like it took a while like to be open, like to become open with other people about my life and how I was going about with like with everything. But making new friends was just a plus for me and like having a good circle and like a good network of friends.

Teroro described her experiences as a result of her desire to have a taste of life outside of what her parents expected of her and what she sometimes wished to have never tasted. The decision not to live up to the expectations of gender norms of her family led to strained relationships, social isolation, economic hardship, homelessness and a consequent dependency on her partner and on the generosity of his family. But with his repeated infidelity came additional embarrassment and shame, and in her view, the final evidence of her failure. In the beginning, she refused to believe that he had betrayed her multiple times in the hope that it might not be true or that it would eventually end. Over time she started accepting the reality of what it was and it started to gnaw on her. Doubts started to emerge about the sustainability of her relationship. She saw his infidelity as a contradiction to his avowed love of her and her being pregnant with his child. She went through great emotional and physical pain during her pregnancy and labour. She

jeopardized her relationship to her natal family to be with him. She conceived his children which in her opinion are a symbol of their love. In short, for Teroro, her partner's infidelity was a betrayal of her love, trust and intimacy and this led her to resort to a powerful strategy -- the rejection of his marriage proposal. In her depiction it became clear that the intention was to 'buy' time so that she could think through her options and possibilities but it was also a way to show him that she was not willing to simply accept his behaviour.

When Teroro spoke about her partner's betrayal it was in emotional terms. She was hurt and disappointed. In the future, Teroro hopes that her partner will not engage in extramarital sexual relationships but she is aware that this might happen. Knowing that she cannot rely on her parents or other members of her natal family and having made the experience of 'being stuck' with only one possibility -- to stay with him because of social and economic reasons, Teroro decided to educate herself. She started studying to enhance her employment possibilities to secure herself from possible economic hardship in the future as well as to accommodate her wish to build a house to no longer be dependent on her partner's family's generosity that she can stay in their house. It is important to mention that I do not want to say that only women with limited or no financial resources enter and stay in a relationship with men who cheat. Betrayal spans all economic classes as does the choice to remain in an unfaithful relationship. Teroro's desire to improve her financial situation through education is better evaluated as part of her moral projects of becoming and self-formation as well as a way to cope with the reality of her partner's repeated infidelity. A change in the financial dynamic in combination with her resolute determination to uphold her commitment to the relationship, she hopes, will stop the cheating and contribute to her desire of a monogamous relationship. Furthermore, after she gave birth to her second child, Teroro joined and actively participated in a local youth

organization. This enabled her to build a security network outside of family structures which in terms of support are a substitution for her natal family. In Teroro's case, staying in the relationship seems also a form of proof to her parents that she has made the right partner choice and that she is able to turn things around -- that in this part of her life she lives according to accepted and expected societal and familial gender norms by upholding a harmonious relationship. It might thus also be seen as an effort to ease the strained relationship with her parents by demonstrating 'good' woman attributes of fighting for and upholding a relationship.

Conclusion

Within their intimate partner relationships, young women navigate a complex array of social forces -- economic uncertainties, stigmatization, family pressure, and persistent gender double standards -- that require careful considerations and the employment of strategies. These, on one hand, can contribute to a woman's projects of self-formation and becoming, while, on the other hand, are mindful of societal and family expectations of stable, partnered relationships. Families' expectations for and the desire of young women to be seen as a 'good' woman who takes on responsibilities and restrains her own desires out of *aro'a*, can, at times, lead to tensions. Community and family members constantly articulate expected ideals of gender specific norm conforming behaviour which can influence a young woman's agency and hence her decision-making process of staying in (or leaving) an unfaithful relationship.

Gender identity is a constant influence on a young woman's sense of self, the conception of her desires and the possibilities to live according to and express her desires freely. At the same time, gender identity is constantly and inextricably inflicted by norms, values, expectations and constraints of how a 'good' young woman should act. Thus, understandings of young Rarotongan women's situated moral agency go beyond terms of

“subversion or resignification of social norms” (Mahmood, 2005, p. 14). The normative forces of societal gender ideals and family’s expectations, as well as a young woman’s own desires and motivations, intersect, producing different notions of what a young woman conceives of as both a desirable and plausible response to the situation they live in.

Yet, I have not met a woman, regardless of her age, who has ‘just’ accepted or would ‘just’ accept an unfaithful partner. Even women who have not been in a stable relationship or have not experienced unfaithfulness within their intimate partner relationships, devised coping strategies for their abhorrence of infidelity. They articulated their desire for a monogamous, romantic and love-based relationship with their partner. They described efforts they would pursue to avoid this situation in their relationships and they strongly advocated their options and possibilities if they, despite their best efforts, found themselves in such a situation.

Leaving an unfaithful partner is usually seen, in Rarotonga, as the strongest expression of a woman’s agency. Cook Island cultural norms do not sanction unfaithfulness in marriage or long term, stable relationships and it is a frequent reason for couples divorcing or ending their relationship. There are, however, a number of reasons why leaving a relationship at a particular moment might not be the best option for a woman. For some, although it might seem a good or preferred choice, it proves not a reasonable option to execute. Being in an unfaithful relationship alters one’s sense of the world and a woman’s place in the world. It takes time to reorganise one’s relationship with an unfaithful partner, with others as well as one’s relationship with one’s self. Reconciling real life experiences with their own expectations, as well as societal and familial expectations, means adapting and creatively searching for reasonable and feasible choices at any one given time.

Chapter Six

Negotiating motherhood

In Rarotonga motherhood is a desired and encouraged dimension of female maturity and, consequently, an important part of many Rarotongan women's lives (see Horan, 2012). Not only is motherhood seen as a part of being a woman, but being a mother is part of socio-cultural conceptions of being a 'good' Rarotongan woman. Unsurprisingly, the pressure to become a mother is high. But what does it mean to be a mother? Natural processes of pregnancy and giving birth as well as lactation have long been described as not exhausting the cultural specific concepts of 'mother' and 'motherhood' (Moore, 1988). This is certainly true in Rarotongan society, where giving birth to a child and being a mother does not go hand in hand. Giving birth does not necessarily mean that a woman enters the dimension of being a mother with all aspects and responsibilities for a child such as nurturing, educating, nourishing and emotional support. Instead, it is customary in the Cook Islands that the first-born child belongs to the father's family and the second-born child to the mother's family.

Scholars have argued that in Polynesia the circulation of children has been frequent, accepted and socially expected (Dodson, 2009; Ritchie and Ritchie, 1979; Carroll (ed.), 1970a). Children are products and symbols of multiple social relations, they are not individual achievements of a couple. They belong and are brought up within the extended family and community. Keeping children to themselves has often been mentioned, especially among older women, as a highly selfish act. Mama Vare, for example, often told me about her grandchildren who live overseas. She explained very emotionally that she and Papa Tere offered several times to take their grandchildren so that their children can focus on earning money and building a good life for themselves.

However, she said sadly that their children decided to keep their children despite the hardship. She always concluded that she understands their decisions because they acted in the same way. They also rejected all offers from her and Papa Tere's family to give their children away despite all the struggles deriving from such a decision. When I asked why she and Papa Tere denied the requests so persistently she lowered her head and pointed out quietly "We just could not do it, it would have broken Papa [Tere's] heart". However, having had these experiences and therefore understanding and respecting their children's position does not make it easier for her and Papa Tere to accept their children's denial to allow them to raise their grandchildren.

Giving a child away adds to the social prestige of the biological parents/mother who are considered generous whereas the adopter (either singular or plural) normally do(es) not earn such a recognition (Carroll, 1970b). The cultural emphasis, however, is directed towards the needs of the adopting parents (Ritchie and Ritchie, 1979). Economic circumstances or health of prospective parents are seldom reasons for a denial of the privilege to adopt a child. The biological parents are often willing and able to keep their child but are morally and culturally required to yield the child particularly to the claim of their own parents (Richie and Richie, 1979). Anna-Leena and Jukka Siikala (2005, p. 147) point out:

It is even regarded as the children's duty to provide their parents with small children to replace them when they grow up. [...] This duty to provide grandparents with children not only concerns unmarried girls, but married couples too.

The custom of adoption is highly respected and accepted among contemporary young Rarotongan women but also terribly feared. Young women might have the possibility to make arrangements that they can see their children regularly or that they can live together. But in the end, young women consistently pointed out, it is often the decision of their

parents where the child lives or if their children know who their 'real' parents are. As is revealed in my conversation with an older woman raised by her grandparents:

My other grandmother from [one of the outer islands] who brought me up when I was little, and I always thought that they were my parents. I was really surprised and disturbed to find out that they are not my mom and dad because they never told me.

A young woman feels that she has a moral obligation to give her children to her parents if they articulate that request. In young women's eyes, fulfilling the request constitutes a moral action -- the showing and reciprocating of *aro'a* -- and there seems to be only small room for negotiations. Negotiations are also feared because they could jeopardize the relationship between a woman and her in-laws and, more importantly, a daughter and her parents. In this sense, adoption in Rarotonga is both an expression of the existing relationship between a daughter and her parents, and a way to make this connection even closer or to ease a strained relationship, as I will outline below in more detail. If giving a child to her parents is a daughter's ultimate expression of *aro'a* for them, then a refusal marks an open demonstration of a daughter's denial to reciprocate and show *aro'a* for her parents and this is something a 'good' young woman should never do. However, young women frequently expressed their wish to raise their children themselves. For these reasons, it is of utmost importance for a young woman that her parents do not raise the question with her.

In this chapter, I examine young women's intergenerational relationships and how they affect young women through the lens of customary childrearing and adoption practices. I follow Veena Das (2010a) and show how young Rarotongan women respond to the claims of others, particularly their family members, and how they allow themselves to be claimed by their family members. This, Das (2010a) suggests, defines the work of young women's self-formation processes. Such a discussion reveals contemporary young

Rarotongan women's ideas, perceptions, understandings and concepts of motherhood (as part of being a Cook Island woman) as well as the ways in which young women struggle to negotiate between customary practices and their desire to make their own childrearing decisions. Importantly it points to how young mothers negotiate multiple subject positions and local moralities through their actions. Their strategic actions provide opportunities to deal with different moral claims arising from one situation and to move between several overlapping but not always harmonious moral frameworks creating the best possible balance of fulfilling community and family expectations while upholding other desires. Conforming with local moralities means negotiating their wishes, desires and social expectations without jeopardizing their relationships with their parents and wider family members. I argue that being a mother in Rarotonga is created through multiple moral frameworks requiring a constant negotiation of gendered moral actions involving mothers, children and the extended family as well as through the existing relationships between those people. Young women develop their identity as mothers as they act and are perceived as 'good' or 'bad' mothers, daughters and women in Rarotonga depending on how they negotiate their interactions with others (see Das, 2010a, 2007).

Customary adoption in Rarotonga

Despite a plethora of outside influences, Rarotongan people have preserved many indigenous practices. One of these practices is customary adoption. Before Colonisation, in the Cook Islands and across Polynesia, adoptions were very common but rarely official (Dodson, 2009; Baddeley, 1982; Carroll, 1970b). Adoption was and still is considered to be foremost a family and community matter, most often arranged between close relatives (Richie and Richie, 1979). People often told me that under all circumstances Cook Islands children should grow up within their immediate or extended family. It is very unlikely for

a family to agree that a child will be adopted by parents of another nationality (see also Buck, 1971a [1934]).

The Cook Islands Land Court was established in 1902 when the islands became a New Zealand territory (1901-1965). In order to facilitate economic development and to enable Europeans to establish plantations, a standardized land tenure system through the Land Courts was introduced. While unsuccessful in these aims, the Court did interfere with many areas of Cook Island practices and custom including customary adoption (Baddeley, 1982). Europeans became aware of the different and flexible patterns of the indigenous practice of adoption and “interpreted the flexibility as neglect and evidence of, and condonement of, immorality” (Ritchie and Ritchie, 1979, p. 36). For these reasons, it has been established that only *officially* adopted children have the right to claim a proportion of family land. In this context it is important to mention that every Cook Islander has the right to claim a part of their family land. Cook Islanders maintain an intimate connection to their land. This connection is associated with the belief that every child entitled to land should be taught indigenous values and be familiar with both local and family specific customs. This explains the strong aversion of Rarotongan people for a child to be adopted by a foreigner. Additionally, adopting a Cook Island child to parents of another nationality would indirectly give foreigners access to Cook Island land.

In previous times marriage and adoption established and confirmed alliances between *kopu tangatas* or *ngatis*. Josephine Baddeley (1982) describes the alliance between Tangiia, founder of *vaka* Takitumu, and Iro, a powerful Tahitian chief as the most prestigious case. Tangiia adopted Iro’s son Pa in order to cement their alliance and gave him the title Pa Ariki of Takitumu. The family still holds this title today. Adoptions between chiefly families were of important political significance. They could prevent hostilities and wars in the same way as marriages. In contemporary times, alliances to this

extent are no longer deemed necessary. However, customary adoption still holds an important place in contemporary Rarotongan society and is frequently practiced. Customary adoption marks a friendship or a special relationship such as the relationship between a daughter and her parents (Dodson, 2009; Baddeley, 1982).

Children adopted in a customary way are called *tamariki 'āngai* (a feeding child) and foster parents are referred to as *metua 'āngai* (feeding parents). *Tamariki* is the common term for children, *metua* for parents or elder and *āngai* means to feed, to foster or to nourish (Savage, 2012 [1962]). It is important to note here that Rarotongans differentiate between adoption and fostering. In case of adoption, natural parents give up all social and legal authority over the child whereas in fostering they keep these rights (Ritchie and Ritchie, 1979). The strong reference to the provision of food mirrored in the term 'feeding child' results from the conceptualization that a dependent person be they elderly, a child or even an anthropologist on fieldwork need to be fed and cared for by somebody (see Chapter Two). Receiving such feeding places a person under certain moral obligations which need to be repaid. The importance of food and its significance for the establishment and maintenance of relationships has been pointed out in more detail in Chapter Two. What is important here is that one of the most basic relationships -- the relationship between parents and a child -- is expressed in terms of feeding. Feeding and therefore caring for a child, be it a biological or an adopted child, creates a lifelong bond entailing rights, obligations, commitments and hence moralities which are ultimately acknowledged when a child cares for their parents when they are older.

The Rarotongan concept of care for parents is holistic. It reaches from physical and financial to emotional support, protecting and respecting parents' social reputation and personal wishes. This includes the expectation that particularly daughters yield to their parents' request for their grandchildren. Unlike a betrothal, the request of a child is

not marked by a formal meeting or a feast. The request can be made any time and in everyday informal circumstances such as over a visit, a meal or during a phone call. As indicated above there was and still is a strong preference to adopt a child within the family. The closer the relationship between the person who requests a child and the biological parents is, the harder it is to refuse such a request. Young women highlighted particularly that such a request from their parents is very hard, if not impossible, to deny as this is one way children are expected to reciprocate the care they received from their parents. A denial is even more difficult if the young woman became pregnant before or at the age of 21, has no stable partner or has not finished her education and is financially or physically dependent on the support of her parents to raise the child. In these circumstances the capability of a young woman to look after her child is under question and the family may decide to give the child into the care of another family member. Not wanting a child or an abusive partner have also been named as reasons why a family may decide to take a child away from their biological parents, as 23-year old Puretu explains:

We have this culture thing that, um, when your cousin is not looking after or doesn't want her child or whatever it is or for whatever reason, we would take her out of, um from like husband and stuff.

Grandparents may request their grandchildren to live with them for several reasons. In general, however, children are thought to be a replacement for their biological parents who have moved out of their parents' household. Children are thought to fill the house with joy, assist with household chores and are expected to take care of their grandparents when they are older and their parents are not able to take on this responsibility. Retirement homes do not exist in Rarotonga. Family members, particularly daughters, are expected to take care of their elderly parents. They usually live together. That elderly people live alone is a recent development and still very rare in Rarotonga. Aunty Va'ine, for example, lives alone in her house. Her daughter lives overseas and her son lives on one of the other

Cook Islands. However, she had a sleepout on her property which she rented out to a single mother and her son. Both entered Aunty Va'ine's house frequently. The woman assisted Aunty Va'ine with several chores inside the house and her son provided a helping hand in the garden and with maintaining the house. The two women cook and eat together several times a week and they keep each other company. Rarotongan people often mentioned migration as one of the main reasons why more and more elderly people live alone. One of my interlocutors, a woman in her 50s, pointed out that the situation has become much worse in the outer islands:

Young people leave the islands. They come to Rarotonga for school and usually go overseas for their studies. Most of them never return to the outer islands. They have no perspectives there. There are no jobs. Every time when I return home, I visit an elderly man. His children and grandchildren live overseas. He is alone and lives from canned food. I usually cook for him so at least he gets real food when I am there. It is very sad.

Customary adoption, in this sense, seems to be one way to ensure the care of the older population.

Motherhood in Rarotonga

Older women told me that family planning, particularly limiting birth, was not of great concern to them or their mothers, rather it was considered a woman's duty and responsibility to bear children for her community (see also Siikala and Siikala, 2005; Richie and Richie, 1979). A duty and responsibility that many young women probably felt they must fulfil as a members of their society. In this sense, giving birth has been and still is perceived as the fulfilment of societal gender role expectations. As 32-year old Mere points out when I asked: What would you say is the concept that Rarotongan society has for a woman of your age?

Mere: The island way? You make babies and you stay home and you cook and you clean. You attend church, then you are saint, you know, doing your

community duties, um, whether is it in the church or in the village, um, that you know how to sew, that you know how to do handicrafts and that you can actually give birth to children and look after them.

Anja: And if you are not able to give birth to a child?

Mere: What, yeah! It's confusing; it's very confusing to people.

Biomedical but foremost sociocultural factors such as a woman's life choices, habits or non-norm-conforming behaviours, such as substance abuse, promiscuity, lack of respect and not maintaining social relationships properly including not looking after her family members particularly her parents, have been named by my interlocutors as probable causes for a woman's infertility. Overall, in Rarotonga, a person's natural fertility is assumed. However, there are indications in the literature that infertility has been understood in the past to exist because of causes similar to the existence of illness. Ernest Beaglehole (1957) notes that the ancient Cook Island ideology of sickness was based on the belief that diseases could be inflicted either by gods due to a person breaking a *tapu* or through a curse by another person. Curses were often motivated by revenge or punishment, for example "revenge upon a rival in love or upon an unfaithful wife, punishment by a father for laziness or disobedience in a son or sexual immorality in a daughter" (Beaglehole, 1957, p. 192). Accordingly, local moral perspectives on infertility are complex and they may taint a woman's moral character and identity.

While infertility was not a topic which came up often during my interviews with young Rarotongan women, some older women mentioned that in the past infertility was not so much of a problem because there were plenty of children within the family and you could just adopt one. Occasional indications in the literature support the prevalence of this perspective across the Pacific (Brooks, 2019 [1976]; Morton, 2019 [1976]; Fischer, 1970; Hooper, 1970; Levy, 1970). Additional to the ideas considered above, namely that grandchildren are given to the couples' parents as a substitution and an old-age provision,

customary adoption seems to be also Rarotongan society's response to infertility. Indeed, in their analysis of Western and Polynesian adoption practices Jane and James Richie (1979, p 33) argue:

[In Polynesia, i]nfertility may be considered sad, or rather a joke that someone might be teased about, but generally it is not shameful and must be compensated for by other kinfolk providing the children that the couple cannot themselves produce.

Following the request of giving a child to another family member is therefore not only expected of couples but considered a mandatory obligation. The described ease to adopt a child, however, seems doubtful. Having experienced the great sadness which commonly accompanies childlessness, an older woman told me that she and her husband tried to adopt several times:

There was always something intervening. Be it that, last minute, the couple decided they will give the child to someone else, keep it themselves or someone closer to them than us requested the child. It was really frustrating. Each time when we have been rejected, it broke my heart and I told my husband 'no more'. I don't want to go through this again. I gave up.

The unsuccessful attempts to adopt a child were very painful for this woman and it was visibly hard for her to share her experiences with me. Commonly a woman who cannot give birth to a child is described as unfortunate, unfulfilled, unlucky and incomplete. Being a mother is, for the majority of women, not only part of their self-realization as a woman, it is also one way for a woman to receive society's recognition. Not having children to care for, on the other hand, according to 28-year old Mereani, can mean that "you are perceived as an unimportant, selfish person, maybe a disappointment because you are not living up to the expectations".

Expectation and meaning of motherhood in terms of ‘being a woman’: the pressure to become a mother

In the last five decades, labour market changes limiting men’s possibilities to find jobs has resulted in both economic hardship and an increase in women’s engagement in paid employment. This led to an increase in women striving for higher education in order to achieve better paid positions. Over the years, these economic changes slowly altered local social expectations of young women. The expectations on young women extended from household and social responsibilities to other areas including, but not limited to, financial contribution, making it necessary for young women to consciously consider and plan the size of their families. Birth rates declined significantly from 7.9 in 1961 to 3.7 in 1991⁵³ and dropped further to 2.8 between 2006 and 2011⁵⁴. Structural factors such as the distribution of economic, political and institutional resources fundamentally influence a young woman’s decision about if and when to become a mother. However, cultural processes and local practices surrounding gender ideologies and norms about appropriate moralities including understandings of how a ‘good’ young woman should behave as well as transnational discourses and young women’s understandings of these local and national discourses also shape the context and meanings of their decision-making processes. As 32-year old Mere comments:

Yeah, I think the island way is a very old-school way of looking at it [a woman’s role], um, whereas now for me and my friends, there are no specific roles. So, I don’t necessarily have to be the homemaker, I can be the person who runs a business as well. I can be, I can do all those things if I want to. I can do all those traditionally considered women’s jobs as well as run my own business as well as, you know, do construction work if that’s what I wanted to do. Um, conservative it’s not jobs that women in

⁵³ National MDG’s Working Group, Cook Islands Association of Non-Government Organisations and the United Nations Country Team of the UNDP Office in Samoa (2005). Millenium Development Goals National Report 2005. [<https://www.sprep.org/attachments/11.pdf>; accessed 08/01/2021].

⁵⁴ [<http://www.mfem.gov.ck/statistics/86-publications/cook-islands-demographic-profile>; accessed 08/01/2021].

the Pacific could do in the past, it's too manly. But, yeah, we are not staying at home anymore and name children.

Despite all the current changes particularly with regard to gender ideals, in my conversations with young women the pressure they felt to become a mother came up frequently as 28-year old Mereani points out:

Well for my age like we get a lot of questions and comments and the worst is actually from women. They would always ask 'oh, where is your *tane*', 'where is your boyfriend' or 'why don't you have a boyfriend' or 'are you dating someone' or, uh, you know, 'do you have any kids?' That's one of the first questions. So, when she finishes school it's almost like you're going to uni but once you finish uni the expectation is that ok, you are supposed to be in that kind of family zone. So, it's still traditional. The expectations of you as a girl is also defined by being in a relationship and then by having children. So, at my age a lot of us that are like in our late 20s when we go and have children like that's considered old. So, they're always asking 'when are you gonna have children?' If you don't have a partner 'when are you gonna have a partner?' like 'why don't you have a boyfriend?' It's like they're still defined by the traditional sense like even if you are educated you are supposed to have kids. You are supposed to settle down. You are supposed to build a house or renovate your family house or like if you are going overseas there is always the expectation that you'll come back and that you'll live here and you'll raise your kids.

Anja: How is that for you?

Mereani: It gets really annoying, every time you meet that's usually the questions that they go to. There is that pressure. I think in school, I am the only girl from my class that doesn't have children. So, like it's always that pressure that you are supposed to like get into a relationship and then once you're in a relationship the purpose is to eventually have children. A lot of those single girls they're almost get pressured to like, you know, it's social pressure that they have a partner and have children - just fitting in! And then they all stop to be. It's all about raising kids so, you know, the issues like when you're a mom, when you have a *tane* talking about their boyfriends. The problems they have with their boyfriends and that stuff. Talking about what they do with their kids or hanging out with their kids. So, you can't contribute to that when you don't have children. You are just not a part of the group and the thing is that the majority of the women around my age and like either above or below are part of that group. So, you become of this minority that either doesn't have a *tane* or doesn't have children. So, and if you do not have either of these like myself, well, then you are almost a minority within a minority. You are an outcaste. So, yeah,

you are kind of like an outcast within the outcaste. Not deliberately but you feel it!

Similarly, 24-year old Moana comments:

[Being a woman,] it can be a little bit, um, pressuring because of like the expectations to start a family, you know, and all that and if you're a woman that's got different goals, um, this can be a little bit off bearing, I guess. I think being a woman in the Cook Islands it's a little bit pressuring. I don't find it's stopping me from doing anything I want to do. But just like, you know, going in a different direction, not having kids but to have a business and, you know, all that study and be successful. My older sister had kids very young. So, it's kind of like, um, I would say it stopped me from having kids young because I saw like she struggled quite a bit. Um, but it didn't stop me from wanting kids because, you know, of course I do but it's kind of like I want to do what I wanted to do for a while before that. I mean just from my, what I have seen, um, when someone becomes a mother that's it, you know, I mean people are kind of, um, that's it, they're 100% dedicated to the family. I am not against the idea of having a family or kids but at the moment I have other priorities, um, building a career and, you know, I studied. I went to university, studied and now I am working, you know, building experience and all that but I am not against the idea of those bits, settle down and then to have kids. Just not now.

Mereani and Moana expressed the pressure they feel they are under to give birth to a child, to become a mother and to provide grandchildren for their parents. However, both Mereani and Moana prioritise other goals at the moment. Mereani plans to continue her university education. She currently lives with her parents and focuses on earning the money she needs to complete a Masters degree at a university overseas. Moana has already finished her studies and career has become a priority in her life. Both women foreground their career goals. This way of thinking stands in contrast to other young women's and older women's perspectives of how the ideal young woman should be; but as Moana said "at the moment I have other priorities". Moana knows that her current way of life and her expectations on life are very different from that of older women as well as most of her peers. However, the phrase "I am not against the idea of settling down"

indicates that cultural notions about motherhood and womanhood remain important to her and she therefore leaves the possibility open to become a mother some day in the future.

Being a 'good' mother

As Mere, Mereani and Moana clearly expressed, in Rarotonga womanhood and social adulthood are strongly associated with being a mother. Being a mother is part of the socio-cultural conception of a Rarotongan woman and the pressure on young women to not only become a mother but to become a 'good' mother is high. A major factor in how Rarotongan's judge what makes a 'good' woman is by being a 'good' mother. It is of main importance to a woman's sense of self and for her projects of becoming and self-formation to have the opportunity to enact motherhood and to be perceived and recognised by others for doing so. Being a mother is what gives women social recognition, is part of how they are perceived by others and how they perceive themselves as well as can be what creates challenges and obstacles for them. The social and cultural demands and expectations placed on mothers were raised several times by my interlocutors. 34-year old Elenoa's statement exemplifies how young women struggle on a daily basis to meet social expectations of 'good' motherhood and to gain social approval for their decisions and actions:

Being a mother! Yeah, they expect a lot of you, like, to be committed to a lot of things but mostly family. And you have to be out there a lot and if you don't show up, that's quite, uh, you have to give a really good reason. Like if I can't come [to a community function] because my son has soccer and I attend that, they would be more like 'oh why couldn't you come to this?' and I have to explain 'but this was more important' and then you need to have a really good reason. You have to be quite committed to, like, commit yourself to everything. You have to find time. I have three children; my husband is away. So, I am mostly raising our children on my own and I work full time. With my children, they have [sport activities] Monday, Tuesday, Saturday and on Wednesdays they have tutoring. Wednesday they got games and also tutoring. They are occupied 5 days a week and that means I am occupied too. So, it's more hands on you to

manage, like for me, I don't have a choice, I have to. I have to do it. If I wouldn't do it, they [community] would think that I am probably lazy or that I don't care about my children, you know, there needs to be always a good excuse, or they will compare you to other women. It is hard.

Young women are torn between the different social and cultural expectations the Rarotongan community has on women in general and mothers in particular. Mothers carefully balance their responsibilities such as house chores and working full time with social-cultural expectations to actively take part in community events and activities their children are involved with while simultaneously sharing their time equally between all their children's activities. The fact that Elenoa's husbands travels a lot for work and is rarely at home places her under additional pressure. She does not have the opportunity to share parts of the responsibility rather as she said "I don't have a choice. I have to do it". To gain social approval for her actions and recognition as a 'good' mother, she constantly evaluates and negotiates ways of how to meet these requirements and to avoid accusations of laziness, lacking interest in her children, or neglecting them.

Probably the most important community event for mothers in general and young mothers in particular are local Baby Shows. Baby Shows are one means for young women to demonstrate 'good' motherhood skills and to gain recognition and social approval for their actions. Thus, Baby Shows are crucial spaces of public judgement revealing not only some of the criteria of what being a 'good' mother means in Rarotonga but also the pressure and the involved emotions mothers particularly young mothers feel they are under to demonstrate that their motherhood skills and actions are appropriately with regards to these social-cultural norms, values and expectations.

Baby Shows are organized by the Cook Island Child Welfare Association (CICWA) in collaboration with the Ministry of Health.⁵⁵ Since the introduction of the Baby Shows in the late 1930s, the program is very successful and popular among the islands of the Southern group of the Cook Islands. Baby Shows have been carried out every year until 2004. Since then, the event is held biannually. Each of the six inhabited islands of the Southern Cook Islands hold their own Baby Shows.⁵⁶ The overarching aim of the Baby Shows is to strengthen and monitor the health and wellbeing of babies, children and parents especially mothers (Tutai, 2017). The children are classified into five age groups, 0 – 5 months, 6 – 12 months, 13 – 18 months, 19 – 25 months and 26 months – 3 ½ years. The first and second place winner of the last age category represent their district/island and compete in the final event -- the National Baby Show.

During the time of my fieldwork, six district Baby Shows were held in Rarotonga between the 11th and the 19th of September 2017 and the National Baby Show took place on 28th September 2017.⁵⁷ Members of the Cook Island Child Welfare Association of each district are responsible for preparing and decorating the place, usually a community house. Together with the attending babies' families they provide food and drinks. Women prepare for these Shows weeks in advance, they sew or buy clothes for their babies and themselves, they organize the availability of all ingredients for the dishes and make sure plenty of flowers are available to decorate the venue and to make the neck and head (*ei 's*) which every special guest receives. Baby Shows, women of all age groups pointed out, are family events. All family members, particularly women, are expected to participate in

⁵⁵ The Cook Island Child Welfare Association was founded in the 1930s. It is one of the oldest non-governmental organisations in the Cook Islands. Their vision is: For safe and better health care for babies, motherhood and fatherhood in the Cook Islands. (CICWA Facebook Page, [<https://www.facebook.com/Cook-Islands-Child-Welfare-Association-Rarotonga-114140040281739/>; accessed 05/01/2021])

⁵⁶ The Southern Cook Islands are Rarotonga, Mangaia, Atiu, Ma'uke, Mitiaro and Aitutaki.

⁵⁷ The six district Baby Shows in Rarotonga were held on 11/09/2017 in Tupapa Maraerenga, on 12/09/2017 in Takuvaine, on 13/09/2017 in Avatiu/ Ruatonga/ Tutakimoa, on 15/09/2017 in Puaikura, on 18/09/2017 in Matavera/ Ngatangia/ Titikaveka and on 19/09/2017 in Nikao/ Panama.

the preparations in one way or another, be it financially or by actively engaging in food preparations, decorating the place or by taking on some of the mothers' duties enabling her to focus on the Baby Show.

The Baby Show jury is appointed by the Ministry of Health and usually remains the same until the final National Baby Show. The judging includes the examination of a baby's weight and height according to their age group, their muscle tone and appearance, a check of the head, scalp and body skin for rashes or sores, ear and nose for any discharges and the mouth (gums and teeth). The time I attended the Baby Shows, the jury comprised one pediatrician, one dentist and four medical students from Germany who completed a four-week internship at the island's hospital. The difficulty, one nurse explained, is to find judges who are independent and free in their decision making:

Ideally, they [judges] should not be related to any of the participants which is nearly impossible to achieve on such a small island. When the Ministry of Health chooses people living on the island, community always accuses either them of influencing the judges or the judges of having predetermined favorites mostly a family member. Public opinions regarding the Baby Shows are fragmented. Some people hold the perception that only babies who are connected to the Ministry of Health will win. Therefore, it is important to have independent judges.

Days after the final baby show where the healthiest baby in the Cook Islands has been awarded, Tekura, my host, told me that she received enormous pressure over the last couple of weeks to ask me to take a place as judge:

It was very hard. I had to fight every day. They constantly asked and I always said 'no'. I explained that you are not qualified. You have no medical training. You are also my guest. You live in my house. It is not a good idea because of our connection. It was really hard to convince them and I am glad that it is over.

Her statement clearly illustrates that my lack of medical knowledge, while definitely true, was only part of the reason why she denied my involvement in the Baby Shows as a judge.

More important, Tekura wanted to stay neutral. Having me appointed as a judge would have provided room for community members to speculate and accuse her of manipulation which in turn might have jeopardized her high reputation in the Rarotongan community. The seriousness of her concerns has been aired publicly through a comment a parent sent to the local newspaper questioning the calculation and awarding of points:

Who are the judges really? Health nurses, foreign students or our district nurses? Are we seriously looking after the wellbeing of infants or are we just looking after our buddies? (*Cook Island News*, 22/09/2017)⁵⁸

Criticism about the judges' performance and the judging criteria was also openly expressed during the events by all members of the audience. I could often overhear discussions or was part of them. One older woman, for example, aired her anger regarding the way the judges do their job when she approached me using a harsh tone in her voice: "Are you a nurse?" I answered: "No, I am not a nurse, I am a social and cultural anthropologist. I was invited by a nurse." "Ah, ok", she answered a bit softer before she asked: "Do you think this is a proper way to judge?" I was surprised and uncertain what to answer therefore I decided to ask a question: "How would you do it?"

Uh, you know, [she said] I would check the muscles properly, would tell the mothers to put out also the nappies. How will they see behind the nappies? It was supposed that children should be naked, and it was always this way, why is it now different? They cannot have a proper look. They play with the kids and have a rough overview but no strong judgment.

The woman's elaborations also stand in close relation to the comments of a nurse when I asked how the judges are prepared for the Baby Shows and what are the main important aspects for them to look at:

They [the four German judges] had an introductory session at the Ministry [of Health] where they have been told that the babies' skin is the most

⁵⁸ [<http://www.cookislandsnews.com/opinion/smoke-signals/item/65977-aitutaki-misses-out>; accessed 27/09/2017].

important category. We explained to them that they have only two eyes but 100 eyes looking at them and if some of these 100 eyes will see scars and cuts which they do not see the community will have doubts regarding the judgment.

The importance of her words became particularly apparent in one Baby Show. A young woman, I judged her to be around 25-years, was visibly distraught when she came to the Baby Show with her 2-year old boy on her arm. Her eyes were red circled by dark rings providing evidence of a short night full of tears. The boy had a big cut above his right eye framed in yellow-green colours. The young woman's mother and her sister walked on her right and left side carefully shielding both from curious glances of the community. Members of the community caught immediately sight of the young boy's bruises and approached the family before they could even reach their seat. The young mother visibly nervous and close to tears stated that her boy climbed onto a chair yesterday morning. She explained that he lost balance and fell with the chair hitting his head on the dinner table. She repeated several times that she could not avoid this happening as she was in another room doing house chores. Members of the community and the District nurse had a close look at the boy's injury. All attentions of the attendees were directed towards the young boy and the examination team. They remained quiet besides some whispering which I could not hear. But according to some persons' facial expressions it was obvious that they had already discussed the validity of the young mother's explanation. The young mother, meanwhile, tipped nervously from one foot to the other until the examination team decided that the description of the event she gave seemed reasonable. The young mother's face expression changed immediately after the pronouncement of the evaluation and her relief was noticeable. The tensions in her face and body slowly disappeared. She hugged her boy, placed their belongings on a chair and completed the initial registration process for the Baby Show. The whole scene took only about 10 minutes but for the young mother it must have felt like ages and I had the impression that some of the tensions

remained during the whole show. She told the story of her boy's injury to everybody who crossed her way, including me, making sure that her explanations were accepted and nobody judged her of being negligent towards her child or even worse of abusing her child. The ultimate relief for the young woman came probably at the end of the show when she and her boy had been awarded a prize.

The announcement of the winners was the final moment of each Show. The audience went quiet and one of the officials called the children's names starting with the third placing. Mothers, female members of the family or fathers presented themselves and their children in front of the audience to pick up their winner's certificate and their prize. Photos were taken and the audience, particularly family members, enthusiastically applauded the winners. The attending mothers were visibly nervous about the results and I had the strong impression that it was not only the children's health which was judged but rather the mothers. They were judged as 'good' or 'bad' mothers, not only by a jury of six, but by the whole audience and by association the whole community.

During the Baby Shows a woman's abilities to mother a child are publicly shown. Women earn credit and are socially recognized as 'good' or judged as 'bad' mothers depending on whether their children are classified as healthy and well nurtured by health officials. In this sense, Baby Shows are very important for mothers reflecting their own as well as their families' social reputation. A child winning a prize is a public demonstration of a mother's care and nurturing capabilities -- her ability to show *aro 'a* - - and therefore of being a 'good' mother and Rarotongan woman. Not winning a prize, due to a child having scratches and bruises or bad teeth, is a public demonstration of lacking these core female qualities and therefore *aro 'a*.

Young mothers' actions and behaviour are constantly scrutinized, watched and judged by their families and the wider community. Baby Shows are events where this

judgement becomes visible and expressed publicly when a mother and her child are awarded one of the three places within the age category of the child or not. However, as Lambek (2010a) states, it is not only important to consider criteria which lead to judgement in specific situations but also how young women discern and negotiate “when to follow one’s commitments and when to depart from them, or how to evaluate competing or incommensurable commitments” (Lambek, 2010a, p. 28; see also Das, 2010a; 2007). Resulting tensions particularly within young women’s intergenerational relationships play out most powerfully in the ways in which young women struggle to negotiate between customary practices and their desire to make their own childrearing decisions. In the remaining part of the chapter, I return to the initial question, namely how young women negotiate between the customary practice of adoption and their desire to make their own child bearing and rearing decisions. I provide four examples of young women who have all developed their own approaches and strategies to deal with competing commitments and possible moral dilemmas such negotiations might cause for their social and family relationships as well as for themselves. I show that how young Rarotongan women allow themselves to be claimed by others and how they respond to the multiple claims they have to face as daughters, mothers and women has significant influence on young women’s projects of becoming and self-formation in their striving towards living a moral life (Das, 2010a). Young women carefully negotiate social and family expectations while considering their circumstances and the multiple subject positions they occupy to maintain pursuit of their own goals and desires particularly to perceive themselves and to be perceived by others as a ‘good’ daughter, mother and hence ‘good’ young woman.

Puretu's story -- "I try not to create a drama"

Puretu: I have a three-year-old daughter but she is, um, she practically lives with us with my parents. But my parents were the one that, um, brought her up. So, I moved to New Zealand to give birth to her than I flew to Rarotonga to be with my mom. Um, then they took her off me, so that I can go back to finish off my studies. Um, so we usually have a ... well actually in my family is that, um, education comes first. You know, we believe that when you have a better education you and your children after you will be able to have a better life. So, that was the, um, the values that our family has been taught. Um, so you will have our religious values which will be Catholic, followed by, um, your education and family. So, we believe that, um, God comes first but education would be a priority as well for our family.

Anja: How would you describe your relationship with your daughter now?

Puretu: Oh, well when I left to go back and study, I think she was 3 weeks. So, I went back to sit my exams. I was away from April till, um, December. When I came back, I wasn't sure whether she would call me her mom (tears). So, um, when I got off the plane, came out of the airport and she actually recognized me as her mom ... like, um, I was so surprised then because I didn't expect her to know that I was her mom because she grew up with my parents. But my dad was like 'well, we just informed her' like 'oh, look this is your mom you can hear her on the phone' and stuff. So, I talked to her through the phone but then in terms of seeing me I didn't know that she would actually recognize me as her ... mom (tears).

Anja: And now at the moment, do you act as her mom?

Puretu: Yeah! A lot actually! But it's actually a good experience actually, uh ... (she started sobbing heavily). It was confusing for me like, um, how to take care of a child and then when I started working last year that's when everything else the motherhood things started to kick in (break because of tears).

So, yeah, um, me and my daughter are actually pretty close but she's really spoiled in the family. Yeah, like really spoiled. She gets whatever she wants and she gets away with anything (laughter and tears). So, um, yes, last year everything started to kick in, um, like what is actually the right food to give her, clothing, the nappies and stuff and now she has started school, paying the bill for school, preparing the lunch. So yeah. But it is a shared responsibility between me and my parents actually. So, they actually been a great help in raising her. Uh, I think they knew that this would be a challenge but they already told me that 'look the decision with your daughter, there is no decision about her'. You know, that's it they just leave it as it is. So, I try not to create a drama with my family. I just try to

avoid, um, that they actually say that, um, they want to keep my daughter and stuff. Like for me I feel I am constantly exposed to this thought because they were always there, they have raised her, you know, when I was away and, um, thinking to get my degree and stuff. So, they helped.

Anja: Would you give your daughter to your parents if they would ask you?

Puretu: Yeah, if I have to.

Anja: But you don't really like this idea?

Puretu: Yeah, um, I don't. Um, I don't like the idea (tears coming back) of giving her up but, um, if it is their wish or if it is just to help me, I mean, um, financially and educational wise and stuff to go further with my studies then I will have to.

Puretu became pregnant before the age of 21 when she had not finished her studies. After she overcame her struggles to inform her parents, they supported her through pregnancy and childbirth (see Chapter Four). Afterwards, her parents decided to take care of their granddaughter, enabling Puretu to complete her studies overseas. Completing her studies was very important for Puretu. Not only because her parents encouraged and expected her to finish her degree but also for herself. Puretu knew that completing her studies would enable her to apply for the desired higher paid job she now has and that this would as well secure her financial independency from her parents, the father of her daughter and a potential future partner as she is able to provide for herself and her daughter on her own (see Chapter Five for a closer elaboration why financial independency is important for young women). Leaving her daughter with her parents was a very difficult decision for Puretu because a 'good' mother is expected to be there and to take care of her child. However, at that time in her life and thinking also about the future and the potential consequences if she would decide not to finish her studies (e.g. financial dependency, disappointed parents), giving her daughter in the care of her parents seemed the best possible decision in these circumstances. A decision which might well enable her in the future to be seen by others and to perceive herself as a 'good' mother and woman. Uncertain if her daughter would remember and recognize her as mother,

returning to Rarotonga was, and the memories of these moments are still, very emotional for Puretu. Her daughter's reaction at the airport was a relief for Puretu in a twofold sense. Knowing that her parents informed her daughter that she is her mother enables her not only to establish a mother-child relationship with her daughter, but it also shows Puretu that her parents accept and approve of her new gained status as mother. In her detailed analysis of the customary practice of informal island adoption (*tamariki āngai*), Marsa Dodson (2010) notes that that it is very common in Mangaia/Cook Islands for families to decide to take children away from their biological mothers because they are considered as too young and inexperienced to take on the responsibilities of motherhood. In a lot of these cases, as the example of the older woman in the beginning of this chapter shows, children are not aware that the parents who raised them are not their biological parents. This leaves young mothers without any possibility to create a mother-child bond and to take on and experience the responsibilities of motherhood. To create a relationship with a family member, as young women expressed powerfully in Chapter Three, means actively participating in each other's lives. Not being able to create a close relationship with a child is considered as the demonstration of a woman's failure as a mother and hence as a 'good' Rarotongan woman.

Having been relieved of this possibility, Puretu currently lives together with her parents and her daughter. After returning from overseas and settling into her job, she started to take on the responsibilities of motherhood. However, as she said "it is a shared responsibility between me and my parents". Puretu acknowledges and appreciates the generous support she receives from her parents in raising her daughter. Thus, her statements indicate that she has sometimes different opinions about how she would raise her daughter. Her main concern develops around her daughter's character development because "she's really spoiled in the family". Puretu decided, however, not to approach

the topic with her parents out of fear this might lead her parents into the request for their granddaughter, a request Puretu feels morally obligated to yield to if her parents would raise the question. The fear of such a request accompanies her on a daily basis wherefore she tries to live up to her parents' and her own expectations of her as a 'good' daughter and mother. She avoids arguments, follows her parents' advice, takes on financial and emotional responsibilities around the house and the family and negotiates her parents' decisions around her daughter's upbringing without creating a drama. Trying not to create a drama by carefully evaluating when to express and when to hold back her own thoughts, opinions and hence wishes of how she thinks her daughter should be raised, in this sense, is not only Puretu's strategy to avoid her parents making a request to give her daughter to them but also enables her to strive respectfully towards living her desired conceptualization of herself, that of a 'good' daughter and mother.

Maara's story -- "Going back and forth"

Um, me, my partner and my kids stay together but we're flowing around (laugh). Well we have our own place, um, his mom and dad have their place, same as my parents. So, we have three places. But because for both sides of the family, the two boys, our two boys are the first grandkids, so, we have to share them between two households, oh three households. It's hard!

So, in the mornings my two boys will go to school. My youngest one is four. My mother in law takes him to preschool. 12 o'clock he finishes this, they go home. Two o'clock they pick the other one up, she takes them home. After work, I finish work here 5 o'clock, I go pick them up. I will go take them to my parents' place. We spent 2 hours there then we travel back to my place. So, that's our life every day. My oven is probably sliding away because I don't cook because there is no time to cook. By the time we get home it's, yeah, it's late. We just either the in-laws are having dinner we eat there or we will just go to mom and dad. But yeah, that is just my life every day. We share these two. It's hard. I try to juggle through. So, say if I go pick them up at the in-laws and one is sleeping I leave one there and take the other one to the other side see the others then come back but if say my parents only sees one they are wanting to see the

other one. So, we're trying to take both of them. In the weekends we stay at my parents' place Friday, Saturday, Sunday.

Our house is just to sleep in because he [my partner] is always at work. I am at work in the mornings by the time we get there it's like always time to do the washing, you know. I follow the washing (laughter) and that's just my life throughout the whole week. We spend a lot on petrol (laugh) going back and forth with these two boys, very special boys. They are very lucky to have two sets of loving family apart from their parents but I am their mom and they are with me at night. So, yeah, that's us.

27-year old Maara's strategy to avoid the potential request to surrender her sons to their grandparents is to drive her two boys around the island seven days a week from her in-laws' place, to her parents' house to her own home to make sure that both sets of parents are satisfied with the negotiated arrangements around the sharing of her two boys. The grandparents' actions can be considered in a twofold way. Maara acknowledges and appreciates the support she receives from her parents and her in-laws who take care of her children enabling her to work and to earn money. On the other hand, however, she knows that her two boys are a significant part of their grandparents' lives. Maara's parents and her in-laws expect her to make sure that they are available to them. Spending a lot of money on petrol and sacrificing some of her own needs including spending spare time alone with her children and her partner, her actions indicate that she puts her in-laws' and her parents' needs at the forefront. This is something a 'good' young woman is expected to do. Indeed, demonstrating 'good' female moralities means establishing and maintaining harmonious and happy family relationships by valuing the needs of others above their own (see Chapter Two). Nevertheless, the thought of having to give her boys away brought tears into Maara's eyes as well as the strong will to do everything possible to avoid the request and in this sense having to respond to such a request. As Maara said giving her boys away is not an option for her and she did not answer my question how she would respond if she would come into this situation. Instead, she told me what she would do, namely to work even harder to show her in-laws and her parents that another

arrangement can be made. 'Working hard' is Maara's strategy to avoid the moral obstacles which come along with the request of her parents or her in-laws to give her children away. Additionally, 'hard work' enables her to comply with another aspect of the social-cultural conception of 'good' Rarotongan womanhood -- being a real mother. In this sense, these strategies allow her to stay on track of living a socially approved moral life.

Maara allows herself to be claimed by her parents and in-laws through the sharing of her children but only to the extent that her children live with her, important childrearing decisions are made by her and the care for her children remains primarily her responsibility. With her hard work she carefully negotiates and constantly reconfigures her interpersonal relationships. She gains social and more importantly her parents' and her in-laws' approval for her actions, not only hoping to avoid a potential request made by her parents and/or her in-laws for her children but also enabling her to form and live her desired conceptualization of herself, that of a 'real' mother.

Teroro's story -- "We're just pretending to be happy"

Teroro: I got two kids a son and a daughter but they don't live with us. Um, my son does, but he doesn't. He is more of with my husband's side and my daughter is more on my side. Uh, ok, let's do this properly. I have got two kids and its customary here where your first born always goes to the father's side of the family. That includes like the name, your first name and your second born always goes to the mother's side, the mother's side of the family. So, I have a son and a daughter. My son is on my husband's side. Um, he pretty much grew up with my husband's like my father-in-law and everything and I was living there. So, I pretty much raised him too but not as much as my in-laws have. Like all I did was just buying the food and the nappies and other stuff but they did everything else. My daughter, um, after three weeks my side of the family came and took her (tears). She is the only girl. So, they wanted to have her. So, they took her. I didn't give her! I didn't give her! They just took her. I didn't know they were coming; I was sleeping (tears). I was sleeping the whole time and my mom, they just came got her and had gone and I was like 'um, now I am stuck here

with nothing' like I had my son but like I just had a newborn little girl and now I don't have a newborn little girl. She's gone like they just came and took her and have left. She's just gone.

Anja: Did you approach your parents?

Teroro: Uh, I did approach them but they were just to start more hatred towards me. That's how I saw it like I wanted to start a big family argument, you know, like 'it's my daughter, you didn't want me in the first place and you didn't want anything to do with me and then all of a sudden I had my daughter and you just come and take her away from me'. I wanted to have that sort of argument but I also knew if my daughter was there it would mean so much for me to have the possibility to go back into my family. An argument would just make the relationship ruin even more. I didn't want my family to stop talking to me or anything. I wanted them to continue. That's how I saw it. I did cry for my daughter because she is mine. I mean I carried her and then I had all the hard yards of like giving birth to her and then having all that ripped away from me was just like really hard for me. But my daughter knows that I am her mom like she calls me mom. She knows she has a brother. She still takes my husband's last name, and we'd get her on the weekend if we are lucky, if they're feeling like it. We cry every weekend that she has to go back. She also used to cry a lot but now she knows that she's gonna see us again. But for us, yeah it's hard! But it's, I don't know, now I just kind of gotten used to not seeing my daughter for like Monday till Friday or Monday till Thursday but I get to see her on Friday's or, like, if there is a, like, a family function than I get to see her. My family does it for the kids. My family is very family orientated. They just love kids and so like us [me and my partner] going back home was all for the kids, you know. So, for everything just to run smoothly. I don't know if you can say that, but we pretend sometimes to be happy, you know, like, my relationship with my family. We're just pretending to be happy so that the kids are happy. Sometimes I feel like I am lying to my children. We're not happy. What's the purpose of going to family functions if we're going there and we are just faking it, like, we're just smiling and then that's it and when we leave then we start stepping the shutter in the back. What a wasted time going to any of those things. But my parents are always happy to see both of my kids. They are the only grandkids. My brothers they don't have kids. I am the only one with two kids. So, they spoil the kids like they used to spoil me being the only girl.

In contrast to Maara and Puretu, for 30-year old Teroro it is not about avoiding parental requests to give her children away. Moreover, for her, it is about how to get particularly her daughter back without pushing the already strained relationship with her

parents to its breaking point. Teroro knows that acting against her parents by claiming her legal right as mother to have her daughter residing with her and her husband would mean jeopardising the relationship with her parents even more. It also seems that Teroro fears that if she claims her rights as mother and takes her daughter with her, her parents might come again to take her daughter, leaving Teroro in a position where she might not have the possibility to see her daughter again without going through a court process. Thus, a court process would probably push the remaining relationship she has with her parents to its final breaking point beyond repair. For these reasons, Teroro decided, instead, to finish her studies, to gain knowledge, to find a good job and to build her own house. This way, she thinks, will enable her to prove to her parents that she is capable of providing financially and emotionally for her children and is therefore ready to take on the responsibility of motherhood. By showing her parents that she has changed and is capable of being a 'good' mother Teroro hopes that some-day her parents will allow her to take her daughter home.

Due to Teroro's decisions in the past and her partner choice, her parent's actions mirror their doubts about Teroro's motherhood capacities and qualities. They are concerned that Teroro and her partner are not able to raise their daughter properly and that if she would not be in their care she might follow Teroro's path which, in their view, is contrary to the Christian path Teroro's parents had envisioned for her (see also Chapter Four). Her in-laws, Teroro commented, do not want to be involved in the complicated relationship she has with her parents --"they already have their share". Teroro and her partner live together with her in-laws and therefore with their son. This provides Teroro with the possibility to see her son on a daily basis and to be involved in his upbringing. This does, however, not mean that she is the main caregiver and fulfills all duties a real mother is expected to fulfil. Indeed, her in-laws occupy the parental position. They make

the childrearing decisions, provide emotional support and teach her son local and family norms, values and practices. Thus, differently to her daughter's case, Teroro's in-laws offer her the opportunity to engage in her son's upbringing with respect to one aspect of motherhood. She supports his son's upbringing financially. She is responsible for satisfying the material needs of her son such as buying food, nappies and clothes. Doing that consistently and appropriately provides a basis for her to build a mother-child relationship with her son and to demonstrate her in-laws and her parents that she can be trusted with motherhood responsibilities. In this way, she hopes, to slowly gain social approval as a mother which might allow her to become involved in other aspects of motherhood in the future not only with regard to her son but also her daughter.

Besides the obvious and probably common sense wish among all grandparents to ensure the health and wellbeing of their grandchildren as well as the availability of possibilities for their personal growth, from Teroro's parents' perspective their actions can also be understood as a means to ensure their old-age provision. As described in the beginning of this chapter, Rarotonga has no retirement homes and daughters are expected to take care of their parents when they are older (see also Chapter Two). Teroro's parents, however, are not satisfied with their daughters' partner choice nor with her way of life, which led to a strained relationship between them. For these reasons, they question Teroro's ability and willingness to take on the responsibility of their care. The expectation that Teroro reciprocates the received care from her parents when she was a child by taking care of her parents when they are older seems to be fulfilled when she gives her daughter away permanently. Not in the way that she herself cares for her parents, but by providing a substitute for herself who takes on these responsibilities. However, giving her daughter away permanently is a very painful thought for Teroro and not something she would like to envision. Indeed, Teroro's actions clearly demonstrate that she is willing to take on the

responsibilities expected of a 'good' young Rarotongan woman by not only taking on the responsibilities of motherhood but also as a 'good' daughter. At the moment this means for her "pretending to be happy" and later this means potentially taking care of her elderly parents herself. All her plans for the future -- finishing her studies, gaining knowledge, finding a good job and building her own house -- indicate her efforts to prove to her parents not only that she is able to take care of her daughter but that she can also take care of them and hence that she has returned onto the way a 'good' young Rarotongan woman is expected to go. A way she hopes will lead to the realization of her own desired conceptualization of herself, that of a 'good' daughter and mother.

Mere's story – "I am definitely going to be the mother!"

Probably the most radical strategy young women use to avoid parental requests to give their children away, is indicated by 32-year old Mere when she discussed her decision not to have children at this particular time in her life:

My family don't understand that I have chosen not to at this age. They say 'what's wrong with you?'. Um, yeah, it is quite perplexing to my own family that I chose not to have children at this age. Just right now I should be married, oh, I am married but I should have children. Yeah, um, I just think children tie you down. I don't want to be tied down like if I would have children and see a trip to Las Vegas I wouldn't be able to go. I would have to stay home. You know, I've grown up in this house and I love my mother and I love my brothers but it's like I had to sacrifice for them for so long, you know, where I was like 'ok I didn't get to go to do this because I had to get my money over for them to go to this like I had to pay for them to go get rugby tickets, so I had to go to do this'. Now that I don't have that obligation, I actually enjoy what time I have left because I know that once I have children, I will literally just go back to being that same person where everything goes into that child because I am definitely going to be the mother! I will be a real mother. I would never put my child through what I went through.

Mere's parents separated when she was a child. She lived with her mother and had to take on the responsibilities for her brothers at a young age. Her mother was working

full time and went out very often in her spare time leaving the responsibility of raising the boys with Mere. For Mere, making the decision to be a mother is strongly associated with these childhood experiences where she felt she had no choice except to mother her younger brothers and to take care of herself. Her mother, she expressed sadly several times, did not fulfil the expectations she has on a real mother because “she was not there” (see Chapter Three). Indirectly it seems Mere feels that her mother gave her children away; therefore, giving her own child away is not an option Mere would ever consider under any circumstances. Moreover, despite the pressure she receives from her relatives to become a mother, she decided to enjoy the time without children and not to become a mother as long as she feels not ready to take on the responsibility of motherhood again. Postponing motherhood can therefore be seen as Mere’s way to ensure the right balance between her wish to live and enjoy her life without the obligation of motherhood and her desire if she becomes a mother to be a ‘real’, a ‘good’ mother. Being a ‘good’ mother for Mere means being there for her child in a way she has never experienced by giving her child the possibility to be a child. A possibility that has been denied to her when she felt she had no choice other than to accept the claim of taking care of her younger brothers when she was a child.

She repeatedly expressed that she had to take on the role of a mother for her brothers out of *aro ‘a* for them. Now, she said, she has a choice because no other person depends on her. Her rejecting responses to the claims of her family members to become a mother can also be seen as a demonstration of her *aro ‘a* for her unborn child because not being a mother at the moment is Mere’s way to ensure to be a ‘good’ mother in the future. Not being a mother enables her to live her life as she wants it, to prepare herself to take on motherhood responsibilities again and to become the kind of person and mother she envisions to be not only for her child but also for herself -- a ‘good’ mother and

woman. In this sense even though she currently acts against social expectations namely to be a mother, the decision not to have children yet and to ensure she will be ready for the responsibilities of motherhood allows her not only to prepare for possible parental or other family members requests to give her child away but also to work on herself and to stay onto the way a ‘good’ young Rarotongan woman is expected to go.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I discussed how young Rarotongan women negotiate intergenerational relationships through the lens of customary adoption. I drew on Veena Das (2010a) and examined how young women allow themselves to be claimed by others, foremost their family members, how they respond to these claims and how negotiating these claims defines their work of self-formation. This analysis revealed prevalent social and cultural ideas about ‘good’ motherhood and hence ‘good’ womanhood in Rarotongan society. I have shown that in Rarotonga giving birth to a child is not directly associated with motherhood. Instead, being a mother in Rarotonga is created through multiple moral frameworks requiring a constant negotiation of gendered moral actions involving mothers, children and the extended family as well as through the existing relationships between those people. Young women develop their identity as mothers as they act and are perceived as ‘good’ or ‘bad’ mothers, daughters and women in Rarotonga depending on how they negotiate their interactions with others.

In Rarotonga womanhood and social adulthood are strongly associated with being a mother. Being a mother is part of the socio-cultural conception of a Rarotongan woman and the pressure on young women to not only become a mother but to become a ‘good’ mother is high. A major factor in how Rarotongan’s judge what makes a ‘good’ woman is by being a ‘good’ mother. It is of main importance to a woman’s sense of self and for her projects of becoming and self-formation to have the opportunity to enact motherhood

and to be perceived and recognised by others for doing so. Being a mother is the main way for women to receive social recognition, is part of how they are perceived by others and how they perceive themselves as well as can be what creates challenges and obstacles for them particularly within their intergenerational relationships. Motherhood is an essential part of being a woman in Rarotongan society; therefore, a woman who decides not to become a mother contrasts the ideal of 'good' Rarotongan womanhood. Contemporary young women's envisioning of themselves, however, is no longer solely centered on reproduction and the care of children. While most of them are engaged in community roles in church, non-governmental organisations and village life, a great majority aim to develop a career and want to achieve personal goals which for some includes being a mother whereas for others it does not. For those women who decide to be a mother, they want to be a 'real' mother and this includes that their children grow up with them and they are able to make independent childrearing decisions. Negotiating their desires in the light of cultural expectations as well as their own personal histories while upholding their social and family relationships is at the heart of what it means to be a young woman in Rarotonga. From their perspective, young women have a moral obligation to give their children to their parents if they would articulate the request. In young women's eyes, fulfilling the request constitutes a moral action, in particular reciprocating, acknowledging, and respecting the care and *aro 'a* they received from their parents when they were younger. A refusal of such a request marks an open demonstration of a daughter's denial to reciprocate and show *aro 'a* for her parents. For this reason, it is of utmost importance for a young woman that her parents do not raise the question. As young women's stories have shown, young Rarotongan women have found, developed and negotiated multiple ways to establish the sharing of children. These negotiations always involve others, but it is mainly the young woman who moulds herself and works very hard to negotiate the tensions between her own desires and social approval in her

striving towards living a moral life while reaching her desired conceptualization of herself, namely that of a 'good' mother, daughter and hence 'good' young Rarotongan woman.

Chapter Seven

Conclusion

Anthropologists and scholars working in the Pacific have long highlighted the importance of social and especially family relationships in Pacific Island communities, such as Rarotonga. This is mirrored in local ideas about moralities. Drawing on Mattingly (2014), Das (2010a, 2007) and Mahmood (2012, 2009, 2005), throughout this thesis, I demonstrated how Rarotongan understandings of moralities incorporate the local importance attributed to context, social practice, and relationality in ways which expand and move beyond ideas of moralities centering on the centrality of the individual (see also Read, 1955).

Young Rarotongan women place great importance on their relationships with and care for their family members. As their stories revealed, young women's moral obstacles are situated and contained to a great extent within these contexts. Their considerations and negotiations of available choices in moments of moral dilemma and the resulting decisions involve both women's individual desires and the expectations others have of them. Young women expressed that they constantly feel the strong expectations society and, more particularly, their families, have for them as well as the responsibilities they have towards their community and family members when considering their wishes, hopes and goals for life. Young women's own wishes and desires for life sometimes challenge socio-historical-cultural expectations, responsibilities, and obligations. This is not to say that young women's desires and wishes exclude contributions to the family or that social and family expectations always contradict with young women's wishes and desires; rather, young women's individual desires are themselves formed from those norms and values. Contradictions and tensions often evolve between socio-historical-cultural

precepts and young women's lived reality of daily life. Negotiating potential tensions between one's own desires and social approval on a daily basis is part of what it means to be a young woman in contemporary Rarotonga. However, young Rarotongan women's responses to these tensions are not only a product of cultural rules and norms, as well as social and family expectations, but also how young women make sense of and negotiate these multiple aspects within specific social contexts and relationships they themselves assist to create. Young women are not simply passive recipients of local norms, values, expectations and moral understandings. They actively participate in their creation when evaluating and negotiating how to balance socio-historical-cultural norms, values and expectations with the complex and changing demands and claims of daily life (Ortner, 2006).

Young women are called upon to try to ascertain what is best for others and themselves in the complex and changing circumstances of daily life and in the midst of several tasks and difficulties they address simultaneously. In the face of often difficult and challenging situations, young women find themselves driven to imagine new ways of life or to become different kinds of persons. They are driven by a demand to engage in often unexpected, even unwanted, projects of becoming (Biehl and Locke, 2017). A demand engendering additional or intensified moral obligations, responsibilities and doubts which, too, require considerations and reimaginings of what will happen, what needs to or should happen or how one should respond to the difficulties and unexpected possibilities these situations offer as well as possible consequences of actions for their social and family relationships. Young women's efforts to negotiate their desires and social approval on a daily basis are part of what it means to be a young woman in Rarotonga, but they are also primary moral projects of becoming and living as a young woman in contemporary Rarotonga. Young women's moral lives -- their moral

experiences -- and moral projects of becoming and self-formation (Foucault, 2005, 1997, 1990 [1986], 1990 [1984]) are shaped and transformed over time involving an array of people including neighbours, friends, community and church members, cultural, state and, church leaders and most importantly, family members. A precedence of the individual over others cannot be assumed and young Rarotongan women's decisions and plans for action are complex and constant negotiation processes of experiencing and thinking of themselves and others within a context where relationality is considered to be of key social value. Indeed, in Rarotonga, social and family relationships provide the core and means to live a moral life, and the main *modus operandi* within these relationships is *aro'a* (Chapter Two; see also Horan, 2012 & 2017). How then do young Rarotongan women strive for a moral life?

I argued that young women's moral striving is revealed in young women's work and actions out of *aro'a* for their interpersonal relationships particularly with their family members, even in situations and contexts where these relationships are challenged and scrutinized by the involved parties. I suggested that through their actions within particular contexts, circumstances, and relationships -- their acts out of *aro'a* for others and themselves -- young women in relation to and with others enact, transform, create and negotiate local moralities.

To convey this ethnographically, I examined four basic dimensions of moral life from young Rarotongan women's argumentative focus of debate: the constitution of a family, pregnancy before and at the age of 21, infidelity in intimate partner relationships, and motherhood. Foregrounding young women's moral experiences within these situations, I reflected on local "moral principles and challenges as they emerge[d] in practice" (Lambek, 2015, p. xvi). I followed young Rarotongan women as they addressed contingencies, faced challenges and obstacles, and reflected on their actions and decisions

in their striving for a moral life while knowing that societal ideals and rules are difficult if not impossible to meet completely or consistently at any time within all aspects and contexts of their lives and elucidated what happens to young women when such events are folded into young women's interpersonal relationships. Such events documented not only local socio-historical-cultural rules, norms, values and expectations, but also disclosed how deeply young women are haunted by the possibility of moral failure -- their failure to negotiate appropriately between the ideals society and foremost their families envision of a 'good' young Rarotongan woman and their own wishes and desires of how to live their life. I suggested that the overarching framework describing young Rarotongan women's practices of living and becoming in the appropriate -- 'appropriate/inappropriate' continuum is negotiation.

Family relationships

As I have shown throughout this thesis, family relationships strongly influence young women's actions, behaviour, and the choices they make in a particular context and thus whether a person is considered a family member and which kind of influence a 'family member' has in a young woman's life depends to a great extent on young women's evaluations of whether these relationships with family members feel right. Evaluating emotions and making accounts of others' and their own character and actions is a moral project young Rarotongan women constantly engage in, particularly about their family members (Mattingly, 2014). In Chapter Three, I explored how contemporary young Rarotongan women identified relationships within the nuclear family and between extended family members who reside in close proximity as well as people who take active part in their lives and show character attributes and emotions such as loyalty, trust and love as the most important relationships in their lives. These values and characteristics are markers for the quality of the relationship between family members. The moral

obligations and responsibilities young women feel towards each of their family members and if they consider these people as family members correlates strongly with these values and characteristics.

The emic concept of family in Rarotonga is not created through blood or marriage but through active, supportive relationships. Family is not something a person is simply born with and which remains forever unchanged. Family is a creation borne from a variety of relationships which are generated, changed, transformed and negotiated throughout life as people participate in activities, create and maintain affiliations, express emotions and feelings as well as behave appropriately or inappropriately according to specific locally defined and expected social and moral characteristics which people show in family relationships, and which may include but are not exclusively blood relatives. Indeed, structures of family and kin relationships are shifting and temporal and relations to blood relatives are only one basis on which indigenous family relations can rest, but it is by no means the only one.

My interlocutors highlighted that who is included in their family and deserves the title 'family member' depends on the character of the person involved and the effort and sacrifices they are willing to make for the family, not on a biological connection. A father who has been absent, a mother who has given her daughter into the care of her parents to live in Australia and did not support her, or siblings who did not spend time together, are not considered family, whereas a friend or a teacher is considered family because these persons fulfill the social and moral characteristics young women assign to relationships with family members. A partner or husband is also not considered family by young women immediately when a relationship starts but as someone who has the potential to become a part of it if he demonstrates a 'good' character. Young women make conscious decisions about when and with whom they will activate their relationships (see Mattingly,

2014; Das, 2010a, 2007). This means that family in Rarotonga is better described as a network of people who actively participate in each other's lives for a long time, provide continuous support, interact frequently, and most importantly share and express emotions and feelings such as loyalty, trust and love. People who do not comply with these characteristics are not considered family. The moral responsibilities young women feel towards these persons and the influence these non-family persons have in young women's lives and their decision-making processes are limited or even absent.

Socio-historical-cultural rules, norms and expectations

As I have shown in Chapter Four, young women's pregnancies and births are embedded in complex local socio-historic-cultural contexts and understandings of relationships. They never occur in isolation and young women carefully reflect and negotiate their options and possibilities within the triad of their personal and social circumstances, individual desire, and family expectations. In line with Veena Das (2010a & b; 2007), who insistently argues that what is considered as 'good' or 'ideal' by individuals within a particular situation comes out of engagements with others and not from a higher agreed upon ideal that individuals strive towards, I showed that the ways young women balance their moral dilemmas and the decisions they make related to pregnancy and childbirth correlate strongly with the range of support and approval their parents provide or withhold. This leads to the assumption that family relationships, in particular the relationship between daughters and parents, (might) stand above Christian socio-historical-cultural moral mores. Indeed, the closer the emotional relationship between a daughter and her parents, the more important it seems to young women that their strategies and actions respect the needs of their parents and are developed in cooperation with them. Moreover, it is this familial relationship which shapes young Rarotongan women's reasoning processes. Therefore, it is not per se about young

women's pregnancies, it is also not about the relationship between a young woman and her partner. Indeed, it always depends on how a young woman engages in all her other social relationships, particularly with her family members. This dictates what becomes important and when, what is considered as success or failure, and how situations and actions are evaluated by the involved parties. In this sense what is considered as 'ideal' is in practice always negotiated between and in cooperation with family members.

Young women's moral agency

Socio-historical-cultural values, rules and norms provide a sometimes contradictory mix of constraints, resources and practical possibilities for women's agency (Mahmood, 2005). As I have shown in Chapter Five, staying with an unfaithful partner does not necessarily mean a lack of women's agency; rather, whether a woman stays or leaves depends on different factors such as society's gender expectations, a woman's emotions, religious belief and her relationships outside of the partner relationship. The assessment of a woman's agency, therefore, requires a careful consideration of the social, historical and cultural contexts in which each woman is situated. Staying with an unfaithful partner can be a woman's performance of expected gendered norm-conforming behaviour or an attempt to assert her own will to uphold a relationship which is desired without the infidelity or simply the best option due to economic, religious, social or family factors. Young Rarotongan women are raised with strong gender specific expectations (see Chapter Two). Gender identity and what one desires is foremost developed in the context of family roles. Positionality and moral agency develop through the constant negotiation of community and family needs and one's own place within the family. The identity from which young Rarotongan women express their moral agency prioritizes their families within gender norms.

The ‘family before self’ approach emphasizes the role of family in young women’s subjectification process whereby it is not surprising that women’s coping and negotiation strategies for issues within their intimate partner relationship will respect the needs of others, especially parents. Individualistic approaches to deal with problems are highly unlikely to resonate with young women because the resources to deal with these situations are gathered in cooperation with their parents and wider family members. Consequently, the context to understand young women’s moral agency regarding infidelity is in the relationship with a current partner *and* the relationship with their family of origin.

Families’ expectations for and the desire of young women to be seen as a ‘good’ woman who takes on responsibilities and restrains her own desires out of *arō‘a*, can, at times, lead to tensions. Community and family members constantly articulate expected ideals of gender specific norm-conforming behaviour which can influence a young woman’s agency and hence her decision-making process of staying in (or leaving) an unfaithful relationship.

Gender identity is a constant influence on a young woman’s sense of self, the conception of her desires and the possibilities to live according to and express her desires freely. At the same time, gender identity is constantly and inextricably inflicted by norms, values, expectations and constraints of how a ‘good’ young woman should act. Thus, understandings of young Rarotongan women’s situated moral agency go beyond terms of “subversion or resignification of social norms” (Mahmood, 2005, p. 14). The normative forces of societal gender ideals and family’s expectations, as well as a young woman’s own desires and motivations, intersect, producing different notions of what a young woman conceives of as both a desirable and plausible response to the situation they live in. Reconciling real life experiences with their own expectations, as well as societal and

familial expectations, means adapting and creatively searching for reasonable and feasible choices at any one given time.

Young women's moral work and their multiple subject positions

As I have shown in Chapter Six, being a mother is part of the socio-cultural conception of a Rarotongan woman and the pressure on young women to not only become a mother but to become a 'good' mother is high. A major factor in how Rarotongans judge what makes a 'good' woman is by being a 'good' mother. It is of main importance to a woman's sense of self and for her projects of becoming and self-formation to have the opportunity to enact motherhood and to be perceived and recognised by others for doing so. Being a mother is what gives women social recognition, is part of how they are perceived by others and how they perceive themselves as well as can be what creates challenges and obstacles for them particularly within their intergenerational relationships. Motherhood is an essential part of being a woman in Rarotongan society; therefore, a woman who decides not to become a mother contrasts the ideal of 'good' Rarotongan womanhood. Contemporary young women's envisioning of themselves, however, is no longer solely centered on reproduction and the care of children. While most of them are engaged in community roles in church, non-governmental organisations and village life, a great majority aim to develop a career and want to achieve personal goals which for some includes being a mother whereas for others it does not. For those women who decide to be a mother, they want to be a 'real' mother and this includes that their children grow up with them and that they are able to make independent childrearing decisions. Negotiating their desires in the light of cultural expectations as well as their own personal histories while upholding their social and family relationships is at the heart of what it means to be a young woman in Rarotonga. From their perspective, young women have a moral obligation to give their children to their parents if they would articulate the request.

In young women's eyes, fulfilling the request constitutes a moral action, in particular reciprocating, acknowledging, and respecting the care and *aro 'a* they received from their parents when they were younger. A refusal of such a request marks an open demonstration of a daughter's denial to reciprocate and show *aro 'a* for her parents. In their eyes, this is something a 'good' young woman should never do.

Indeed, as I have demonstrated throughout this thesis, young Rarotongan women carefully negotiate multiple subject positions and local moralities through their actions. Their strategic actions provide opportunities to deal with different moral claims arising from one situation and to move between several overlapping but not always harmonious moral frameworks creating the best possible balance of fulfilling community and family expectations while upholding other desires. Conforming with local moralities means negotiating their wishes, desires and social expectations without jeopardizing their relationships with their parents and wider family members. These negotiations always involve others, but it is mainly the young woman who moulds herself and works very hard to negotiate the tensions between her own desires and social approval in her striving towards living a moral life while reaching her desired conceptualization of herself, namely that of a 'good' mother, daughter and hence 'good' young Rarotongan woman.

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