Narratives of Culture and Development in Kiribati: Reconciling Tensions to Advance Gender Equality

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Abstract

In recent years, there has been a growing emphasis by the Kiribati Government and its development partners on addressing issues of gender inequality. Yet, within the literature there continues to be a contradiction in the way contemporary gender inequities in Kiribati are understood. Kiribati 'culture' is simultaneously framed as the cause of and solution to gender equality. On the one hand, Kiribati is a patriarchal society, where violence against women is traditionally accepted and normalised. On the other, violence is vehemently denied as being a part of Kiribati culture. This thesis argues that where these narratives stem from and who voices them, matters.

Narratives and counternarratives of culture, voiced by powerful actors in the region, continue to shape Pacific politics, policy making, and development. These narratives can position Pacific custom and culture as impediments to progress, incompatible with ideals such as human rights and gender equality. On are used to justify harmful practices towards the region's most vulnerable, including women and LGBTQIA+ communities. It is within this context that the current thesis has sought to critically interrogate narratives and counternarratives of 'culture' and 'gender' in the Kiribati context; revealing the colonial matrices of power that continue to produce these tensions.

Through a decolonial analysis of contemporary gender initiatives in Kiribati, combined with insights from five I-Kiribati women who have had extensive experience working within gender-related fields in Kiribati or with diasporic Kiribati communities in Aotearoa New Zealand, this thesis argues that Kiribati perspectives and worldviews can provide ways to partially reconcile these tensions and advance progress towards gender equality. However, this thesis contends Kiribati culture will continue to be simultaneously framed as the cause of and solution to gender inequality, until the colonial matrices of power are exposed and decolonised, leaving room for indigenous expressions of diverse identities relationships to emerge and flourish.

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To everyone who has supported me along this journey, au bau ma ngkami te mauri, te raoi ao te tabomoa - may health, peace and prosperity be with you!

Preface

During two years of volunteering in Tarawa, Kiribati I began noticing the various ways Kiribati women are positioned in development spaces. One moment that sticks out to me was an interaction between myself and my volunteer manager, an I-Matang (European) man. I was planning to host a film night fundraiser for the women's organisation I was volunteering with, and my manager suggested having speakers at the event. Even better if the speaker was to be a young I-Kiribati woman. I loved this idea and through my time there I already had several inspiring young I-Kiribati women in mind.

My manager then suggested, "how about the young girl who works at the store down the road? She is an example of a young Kiribati woman who is so talented, speaks English and yet is working full-time at this store. She could be anywhere she wants to be, yet she's here!"

Immediately this didn't quite sit right with me.

Did my manager know that this "young Kiribati woman who speaks English" was the daughter of the owner of said store? The store being one of several businesses owned by the family all along South Tarawa and could be part of South Tarawa's urban 'elites. From my own personal knowledge, I knew this girl had had an overseas education, was an Australian citizen and was likely working in the shop as part of her duties to help run the family business and eventually own it.

What influenced my volunteer manager to view this young woman as an ideal candidate for an inspirational speaker at the fundraiser?

Did he simply see a young Kiribati woman working in a store in South Tarawa and assume that her life's outlook and opportunities were being limited? Did he assume because she could speak English, she was somewhat more intelligent than the other young women in the store? Did he see a young woman who had tremendous potential, but in need of 'saving' perhaps by more progressive, modern development initiatives?

This subject position that my manager had created for this young woman reflects a tendency in development spaces, as well as in academic literature, to homogenise women in the global 'south'. Women in the global 'south' are often portrayed as being vulnerable, socio-economically disadvantaged, and whose potential needs to be untapped by modern and progressive 'development' from the West. These narratives often don't recognise difference and the differentiated experiences that women have, as well as the multiple processes, power relations and oppressions that intersect to shape women's lives.

If I was to have gone along with my manager's suggestion, what would that have produced in terms of Kiribati women's voice or empowerment? Would I have been reinforcing certain colonial and gendered relations?

This interaction I had within an international volunteer agency working in Kiribati, was but one small example in a country, where a large amount of official development assistance comes into the country through aid, development projects and fly-in-fly-out consultants, and yet indigenous Kiribati women voices and perspectives are often hidden.

This has led me to question how there can be so many people coming into a country eager to 'help' but rarely are Kiribati people listened to or centred in initiatives designed to 'improve' our situations.

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Glossary of Kiribati Words and Phrases

aine/mwane	woman/man
ataei	child
ataeinaine/ataeinimwane	an unmarried woman/man
binabinaine	a man who acts in the manner of a woman, also now used as a term to refer to men who have sex with men (MSM), gay or bisexual men and transwomen
binabinamwane	a masculine woman, also a term to describe lesbian and bisexual women and transgender men
buia	local house
bwai n te roo	things of darkness, used to refer to old Kiribati traditions and practices
eiriki	a relationship between a man and his sisters-in-law
inai	coconut leaf mat
kainga	traditional ancestral place of residence
maneaba	traditional meeting house
maroro	conversation, to converse
rikiara	our way
taona tabon inaim	to sit on the edge of your mat
te kabutiman	a traditional engagement
te kabwarabure	a formal apology
te katei ni Kiribati	Kiribati culture
te maiu raoi	the good life
te ribana	to cultivate
te taetae ni Kiribati	the Kiribati language
tiaki ara katei	not our culture
tinaba	a relationship between a man and his daughter-in-law
Tungaru	Indigenous name for Kiribati
unaine/unimwane	elderly woman/man

Abbreviations

MVPFAFF+	Mahu, Vaka sa lewa lewa, Palopa, Fa'afafine, Akava'ine, Fakaleiti, Fakafifine and other Pasifika sexually or gender diverse people
LGBTQIA+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Queer, Asexual and other sexually or gender diverse people
ABCFM	American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions
AMAK	Aia Maea Ainen Kiribati
BIMBA	Boutokaan Inaomataia ao Mauriia Binabinaine Association
BPfA	Beijing Platform for Action
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women
COVID-19	Corona virus disease 2019
DFAT	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
EBS	Elaine Bernacci School for Girls
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
GAD	Gender and Development
GEIC	The Gilbert and Ellice Island Colony
GEWD	Gender Equality and Women's Development Policy
GoK	Government of Kiribati
KGV	King George V School
LMS	London Mission Society
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
MSM	Men who have sex with men
MWYSSA	Ministry of Women Youth Sports and Social Affairs
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NTNK	Nei Tabera ni Kai
PIF	Pacific Islands Forum
PLGED	Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration
PNG	Papua New Guinea
PPA	Pacific Platform for Action
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals

SPC	The Secretariat of the Pacific Community
SPV	Strengthening Peaceful Villages Programme
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
VAW	Violence Against Women
VAWG	Violence Against Women and Girls
WAD	Women and Development
WEE	Women's Economic Empowerment
WID	Women in Development

Chapter One: Introduction
Gender contradictions and tensions in Kiribati

Kiribati is traditionally a sexist society (Baantarawa et al 1997)

The characteristics of intimate partner violence in Kiribati are not a result of colonisation or poverty, but its patriarchal system (Teatao 2015, pg. vi)

[In pre-Christian Kiribati custom] woman was the companion of man and not his slave – Katherine Tekanene (Griffen, 1976)

Te iowawa nakoia aine ke ataei, tiaki ara katei[1] / violence towards women and children is not our culture (Ministry of Women Youth Sports and Social Affairs, 2015)

The Republic of Kiribati, an atoll nation in the Central Pacific, is host to some of the world's worst gender inequality statistics. Recent studies show that Kiribati has the highest rate of lifetime prevalence of intimate partner violence, globally (WHO, 2021). Indicators also point to the low economic participation of women, low participation of women in formal leadership and decision making, and a lack of access to sexual and reproductive services (Pacific Women, 2020). In recent years, both the Government of Kiribati (GoK) and its development partners have given a growing emphasis on addressing gender issues to achieve gender equality. In 2019, the GoK established its first ever *Gender Equality and Women's Development* (GEWD) National Policy (MWYSSA, 2019). The GoK is also committed to regional and international which sought to achieve gender equality including ratifying the *UN Convention for the Elimination of Discrimination against Women* (CEDAW), recognizing its obligations under *Sustainable Development Goal 5 – Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls* (SDG 5), as well as being a signatory to the *Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration* (PLGED) (GoK, 2019). The biggest regional gender commitment in the region to date has been through Australia's DFAT initiative, *Pacific Women*

[1] Throughout this thesis I have intentionally not italicised I-Kiribati words in an effort to resist a form of 'linguistic colonization' and 'exoticization' of supposedly 'foreign' words within academia (Ashcroft et al., 2002). English translations appear in parenthesis throughout.

Shaping Pacific Development (Pacific Women) which has invested AUD9.9 million dollars in Kiribati for initiatives to address gender issues by supporting women's empowerment (Pacific Women, 2020). However, as the emphasis on addressing gender issues has increased, contradictory understandings have emerged in literature that focuses on the intersection of gender inequality and culture.

There is a body of literature including theses, government and aid agency documents, policy briefs and reports that frequently highlight the patriarchal characteristics of Kiribati culture and society (Teatao, 2015; Lievore & Fairbairn-Dunlop, 2007; Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, 2020; Wattal, 2017). Within this literature Kiribati is characterised as a patriarchal and sexist society. Reference is made to conservative cultural norms such as customary leadership systems that explicitly exclude the participation of women; rigid gender roles where men are perceived as decision makers, whilst women must be obedient to their husbands and are generally confined to the home. Furthermore, reference is often made to a culture of jealousy amongst men and their wives, tight control over a women's sexuality and movements and the normalisation of violence against women by their husbands and other male family members (Lewis, 1990; Lievore & Fairbairn-Dunlop, 2007).

On the other hand, others refute such claims and support a small number of initiatives that seek to meaningfully embrace and revitalise Kiribati culture. Katherine Tekanene, a pioneering voice for women's issues in Kiribati, asserted that in pre-Christian Kiribati society, there were inequalities in certain aspects of Kiribati society, but woman was the companion of man and not his slave (Griffen, 1976). Namoori-Sinclair (2020) also points to the ways Kiribati women held positions of power in more covert ways, ultimately being the gatekeepers of their husband's decisions. Efforts to embrace Kiribati culture within initiatives that address gender-based violence are also evident. A popular initiative led by the Ministry responsible for women's affairs, the Ministry of Women, Youth, Sports, and Social Affairs (MWYSSA) posted the slogan "te iowawa nakoia aine ke ataei, tiaki ara katei" or "violence towards women and children is not our culture" posted everywhere as part of anti-violence campaigning. Within the diasporic Kiribati community in Aotearoa New Zealand, the *Boutokaan te Mweraoi: A Conceptual framework for enhancing I-Kiribati wellbeing*

(Kiribati Working Group and MSD, 2015) was developed as part of a larger strategy to provide culturally appropriate domestic based violence initiatives for Pacific communities.

So, how is it that Kiribati culture can simultaneously be framed as the cause of, and solution to, gender inequality?

Narratives and counternarratives of culture or custom in the Pacific, such as those expressed above, play a role in shaping discourses of politics, policy making and the design and implementation of development projects, albeit with varying degrees of power (Naidu, 2019; Hooper, 2005). One argument that holds disproportionate weighting in policy making circles is that 'culture' and 'tradition' in the Pacific, negatively influences progress towards economic development, good governance, and democracy. These types of countercultural narratives can legitimise the dominance of technical and Western knowledge at the expense of Indigenous knowledge systems. This is particularly problematic in a region where Indigenous ontologies and epistemologies have historically been devalued and undermined through colonization (Thaman, 2003). Conversely, powerful narratives of 'culture' have also been used to legitimise harmful practices towards women. Maintaining 'culture' has often been used as an argument for not addressing gender norms that disadvantage women and for not challenging inequitable gender relations (Jolly, 1996; Merry, 2008). An excerpt from a poem by ni-Vanuatu politician and poet Grace Mera Molisa, articulates this point:

Inadvertently
Misappropriating
'Custom'
Misapplied
bastardised
murdered
a Frankenstein
corpse
conveniently
recalled
to intimidate
women

(Molisa, 1983, p. 24)

Given that narratives of culture have been used to both justify and legitimise the agendas of development actors in the Pacific, it is worth interrogating the contradictory narratives of gender and culture in the context of Kiribati. It is vital to be critical of the ways 'culture' is framed within contemporary gender initiatives to resist colonial and patriarchal tendencies. Some feminist scholars have been arguing for decades now for a decolonial approach to address gendered violence and inequality (Mack & Na'Puti, 2019). Decolonial feminist scholar Maria Lugones (2010) argues through her notion of the 'coloniality of gender' that gender, as a specific system of subjugation, was a key mode of colonial control. Thus, by taking a decolonial approach, this thesis seeks to understand how contradictory narratives of gender and culture emerge. What understandings of gender are contemporary gender initiatives in Kiribati working with? Might I-Kiribati ways of thinking and knowledge shed light on these contradictions? And how might we resolve them?

Despite long-standing calls in the region for research to further investigate Pacific epistemologies and ways of doing within development (Gegeo 1998; Gegeo & Watson-Gegeo, 2001; Meyer, 2001; Qalo, 1998) literature that centres and explores indigenous Kiribati knowledge and perspectives is limited. Over the years much formal research and policy making in Kiribati has continued to be dominated by Western systems of knowledge, which have also coincided with the over-crowded nature of foreign development and aid in Kiribati. There is a never-ending stream of foreign development projects and initiatives, consultants, NGOs, and other well-intentioned practitioners eager to fix and solve the many issues Kiribati is facing. Kiribati voices tend to be missing from these spaces. Thus, to understand the complexities of gender relations and gender systems in Kiribati, this research draws on the knowledge and experiences of five I-Kiribati women who have had extensive experience working within gender-related fields in Kiribati or within the diasporic Kiribati community in Aotearoa/New Zealand.

Furthermore, whilst there may not be much by way of formal research or written texts, there are indeed rich sources of documented Kiribati knowledge that can be found. The Kiribati language for example provides insight into I-Kiribati perspectives. The term 'rikiara' is used by Government ministries to refer to 'gender'. Key differences between these two terms reveal nuances in how

gender is conceptualised, revealing a more holistic and relational understanding of gender. Furthermore, Pacific film has been explored as a potential site for self-determination and political agency within development (Puka, 2014; Stupples et al 2021; Stupples and Teaiwa, 2017; Barclay, 2015; Woodward, 2015). In the context of Kiribati, a rich collection of documented knowledge lies within the films of a well-known local film production company *Nei Tabera ni Kai*. Established by I-Kiribati filmmaker, Linda Uan, and her partner John Anderson in 1997, *Nei Tabera ni Kai* has produced more than 400 films in both English and the Kiribati language, focused on Kiribati knowledge, lives, issues and communities. The name *Nei Tabera Ni Kai* comes from the spiritual totem of Uan's clan, that has a special interest in women's health issues, and success in courtship. The film unit has provided several films that deal with issues of gender and have been heralded by Teaiwa (2020) as documenting te katei ni Kiribati or the Kiribati way. Through an analysis of these films, combined with the experiences of five I-Kiribati women who have had extensive experience working in gender-related fields, and an analysis of contemporary gender and development initiatives, this thesis seeks to interrogate the contradictory narratives around gender and culture in the Kiribati context.

Research Aims and Questions

The overall aim of the current research is to interrogate the contradictory narratives around gender and culture in the Kiribati context. It seeks to do this by using a decolonial lens to analyse two gender initiatives, *Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development* (Pacific Women) and the *Nei Tabera Ni Kai Film Unit* (NTK), to explore what understandings of gender and culture both initiatives work with and the tensions they may resolve or reproduce in terms of how gender is understood in Kiribati.

In relation to the overall research aim, the research asks the following questions.

1. What are the colonial and political contexts in which understandings of 'gender' and 'gender roles' have emerged in Kiribati?

2. What understandings of gender do Pacific Women and NTNK work with and what narratives do they (re)produce?

3. How do contemporary gender initiatives resolve or reproduce contradictions in the way culture and gender is understood in Kiribati?

Thesis Outline

Following this introductory chapter, Chapter Two outlines the theoretical framework that underpins the current research. As stated earlier the current research takes a decolonial approach to exploring contradictory gender narratives in Kiribati. Decolonial theory emerging out of the decoloniality school of thought will be discussed as well as key literature from decolonial feminist and indigenous Pacific scholars. Chapter Three will then provide an overview of the research methodology, detailing my positionality as researcher as well as an overview of the research methods adopted, the collection and analysis of data. Chapter Four and Five addresses research question one by exploring the colonial context of Kiribati, whilst the latter chapter explores key regional and international political moments out of which gender discourses in Kiribati have emerged. Chapter Six turns to Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development and the types of gender understandings this externally driven initiative works with, and how Pacific Women may resolve or reproduce tensions. This leads on to Chapter Seven which explores a series of Nei Tabera ni Kai films, as a Kiribati voice, sheds light on these contradictions. Lastly, Chapter Eight concludes the thesis with a discussion on the main research findings.

Chapter Two: Engaging with Theory

> One of the most powerful myths of the twentieth century was the notion that the elimination of colonial administrations amounted to the decolonization of the world. This led to the myth of a 'postcolonial' world. The heterogeneous and multiple global structures put in place over a period of 450 years did not evaporate with the juridical-political decolonization of the periphery over the past 50 years. We continue to live under the same 'colonial power matrix.' With juridical-political decolonization we moved from a period of 'global colonialism' to the current period of 'global coloniality'.
>
> (Ramon Grosfoguel 2011, p. 14)

Introduction

To explore how contradictory understandings of gender and culture may emerge in Kiribati, the thesis takes a decolonial approach, relying on theory from scholars in Latin America. According to decolonial scholars, the era of decolonization that marked the latter half of the twentieth century was an unfinished project. Whilst many colonies gained political independence in this time, little was done to divest from ongoing colonial systems of governance, knowledge-making and organizing. Thus, much of the inequities that exist today, particularly within the global south, are embedded within a complicated matrix of power that has emerged out of this colonial history. It is from this theoretical standpoint that this thesis invites an exploration of contradictory gender narratives in Kiribati today. Whilst the work from this specific school of thought has yet to be taken up extensively in the Pacific, similar ideas have no doubt influenced the work of many Pacific leaders, politicians, and scholars (Teaiwa, 2020). Similar ideas and thinking can be found in the works of scholars in the region, highlighting the intersection of patriarchal and colonial forces that have consequently shaped understandings of gender and the status of gender inequality in society today. Thus, as well as exploring key concepts from the decoloniality school of thought – Mignolo's coloniality of power and Lugones' radical notion of the coloniality of gender' – this chapter will also discuss key literature that has emerged from the Pacific including discussions around the role of colonization and gender, Pacific feminism(s), and indigenous Pacific queer literature.

Coloniality of Power

Perhaps one of the most crucial ideas to emerge out of the modernity/coloniality school of thought, and most pertinent to the current thesis is the notion of *coloniality* (Mignolo, 2007). Initially coined by Peruvian sociologist Anibal Quijano and further developed by Argentine semiotician Walter Mignolo, the term coloniality refers to the way colonial structures can prevail within former colonial societies, even after the emergence of the independent state. For Quijano and Mignolo, the era of political decolonization that occurred in the latter half of the nineteenth century was an unfinished project, giving way to a new era of coloniality. In other words, coloniality can be understood as the inheritance Western powers left behind in their ex-colonies; an invisible power structure that continues to sustain colonial relations of exploitation and domination.

Central to an understanding of coloniality is how Quijano understood the process of colonization itself. Unlike other postcolonial and anticolonial scholars of the same era whose work focused on British and French imperialism, colonization for Quijano occurred much earlier. For Quijano (2008), colonization began in 1492 with the arrival of the European conquistadors in the Americas. This arrival marked a process of racialisation which became integral to colonization in the centuries that followed and has been sustained now through the coloniality of power. This process of racialisation began when upon arrival into the 'New World', the European Conquistadors saw themselves as natural rulers of all 'inferior' people, or those racialised as non-European and 'other' (Quijano, 2010). These racialised ideas originated in debates during the Spanish Inquisition and the Reconquista. During this time Europeans created the notion of the 'purity of blood' to distinguish 'real' Christians from converted Jews and Moors. By inventing a false idea of race that privileged Catholics, who were predominantly European, the Spanish were able to justify the expulsion of Moors and Jews from Spain. Although initially a myth to legitimise a religious hierarchy in Europe, these ideas were imported to the 'New World' through the conquistadors and proved useful to the colonizing enterprises that followed. The arrival of the conquistadors into Latin America therefore worked to reclassify entire populations based on these racialised hierarchies.

This process of racialisation that was integral to the colonial enterprise operated through what has been termed the 'matrices of power'. Mignolo (2007) argued that the coloniality of power operates through four key matrices of power which perpetuate unequal relations of power between the global south and north. The first is control of the economy. This is through dispossession, land appropriation, the exploitation of labour and control of natural resources. The second is the control of authority, through the dismantling and deconstruction of indigenous governance systems. Third is the control of gender and sexuality, by this he refers to the reconstitution of the 'family' according to Western bourgeois terms, combined with the introduction of Western-centric education which displaces indigenous knowledges. Lastly, control of subjectivity and knowledge, including epistemological colonisation and the re-articulation of indigenous subjectivities, as inferior or lacking. The last two points are particularly relevant in the Kiribati context which I shall discuss later in Chapter Four.

In contemporary times, these colonial matrices of power continue to structure and perpetuate colonial relations. Underlying these structures is an assumption of the racial superiority of the European and the inferiority of the non-European 'other'. Much of the global systems that organise the world today are bound up by these matrices of power and are not innocent in the construction of global inequities. The coloniality of power works to ensure the continuity of colonial mentalities, psychologies, and world views into the so-called 'postcolonial' present. This has led some to argue that discourses and practices within international development and aid are also embedded within these structures (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2012). Thus, issues of gender inequality within former colonised societies also need to be examined within these matrices of power.

Coloniality of Gender and Decolonial Feminisms

Inspired by Quijano's 'coloniality of power' and unconvinced by Black feminist, Kimberle Crenshaw's concept of 'intersectionality' (Crenshaw, 1989), feminist decolonial scholar Maria Lugones introduced her own concept of the *Coloniality of Gender* (Lugones, 2007). For Lugones, gender was just as essential to the colonial project as race was to Quijano. Largely critiquing the work of her male colleagues, as well as mainstream feminists at the time, Lugones criticises the essentialist nature in which sex and gender have been framed in scholarly literature on coloniality,

arguing that gender as a construct has been socially constructed through the process of colonialism. For Lugones, the way in which mainstream feminist analyse conceptualised ‘gender’ was still rooted in Eurocentric understandings. For example, many feminists’ analysis often presupposed sexual dimorphism and heteronormativity as a universal norm, as well as presuming a patriarchal distribution of power across all societies. Through a *coloniality of gender* lens, Lugones challenges such atemporal, universal claims of western feminist discourses, allowing us to consider the historical moment in which ‘gender’ as a specific colonial system, was imposed upon indigenous societies and became a form of subjugation (Icaza and Vazquez, 2016).

To explain further, Lugones argues European understandings of gender and sex were imposed upon indigenous people through colonization. This new gender system designated a binary, heteronormative understanding of gender which differed to how indigenous peoples conceptualised themselves. In her essay, Lugones draws on Oyewumi’s (1997) work on the Yoruba, an ethnic group indigenous to Nigeria, to argue gender did not exist as an organizing principle of power in pre-colonial indigenous societies. Other more salient features existed for organizing social life such as age, kinship ties and genealogy. Thus, rather than assuming gender is a universal feature of social organization across all societies, Lugones argues gender should be seen as a colonial construct and as a system used to subjugate indigenous people. Paredes (2008) advances a critique of Lugones, by suggesting that the coloniality of gender misses the centrality of gender to patriarchal indigenous societies prior to colonization. Whilst Segato (2001) questions Oyewumi’s claim that gender was non-existent among the Yoruba. Drawing on her own research among Yoruba in Latin America, Segato argues that gender still existed as an oppressive status differentiation among the Yoruba, suggesting that ‘low intensity patriarchies’ became more hierarchical when subjected to the logic of gender imposed under colonization. As public and private spheres were separated and gendered, Indigenous women were domesticated and privatised, losing any forms of power and status they once held in the community. Whilst Lugones’ specific claims about the coloniality of gender remain controversial (Mendoza, 2014), many of those who have critiqued her work agree that the imposition of a European gender system had profound effects on relations between Indigenous people in the colony, not only between men and women but also subjectivities that exceeded the imposed gender system (Mendoza, 2016).

Decolonial thinking allows us think what might be beyond the imposed gender system and to envision decolonial futures. Whilst mainstream feminist analyses are useful to understand the reality of contemporary society, they do not allow us to uncover the plurality of temporalities and experiences that exceed limited western categories and understandings of gender. These experiences are surfacing today evidenced by many decolonial, indigenous and queer movements globally, whilst others lie dormant, hidden by the hegemony of the modern/colonial gender system. It is in this sense that the coloniality of gender brings a decolonial shift in the way we see and understand the world. It allows us to see beyond the universal category of women, purported by mainstream feminisms to see how the colonised subject has been subjected and dehumanised through the coloniality of gender, whilst communal selves and egalitarian relationships have been stripped and broken away. As Icaza and Vazquez (2016) state, "Mainstream gender analyses therefore cannot help us to fully understand decolonial resistances that exceed the imposition of Western, geo, body and epistemic experiences as the totality of reality." (p. 68). The analytic of gender, patriarchy and heteronormativity are no doubt useful for understanding the internal dynamics of the system of oppression, but they blind us to alternative ways of knowing and being that come from outside the colonial gender system. In order to think and be decolonial, we need to go beyond gender, to move away from the vocabulary of patriarchy, gender and heteronormativity and open the possibility of thinking communal, of thinking about coalitional resistances to produce a world outside the coloniality of gender.

Complicating Gender in the Pacific

Although the ideas of Mignolo, Quijano and Lugones have not been extensively taken up in the Pacific, there is ample evidence to suggest that gender imposition was also a key mode of colonial control in the region. The works of many Pacific scholars, both indigenous and non-indigenous, highlight parallels to the way in which Lugones theorised the experience of indigenous people in Latin America (Lopesi, 2021; Tengan, 2002; Jolly & Macintyre, 1989). The travelling of feminist ideas into the Pacific has also generated significant debates amongst Pacific scholars, revealing the limits of mainstream feminist analyses for understanding issues of gender in the region, revealing the patriarchal or colonial tendencies of certain narratives of 'culture' or 'custom'. Lastly, scholarship from indigenous Pacific queer scholars reveals resistances to the

modern/colonial gender system and expands understandings of gender through the centring of indigenous Pacific epistemologies (Thomsen & Brown-Acton, 2021; Moreton-Robinson, 2020; Aikau, 2021; Hall, 2009).

Colonization and Gender in the Pacific

Similar to Lugones (2010), many scholars in the Pacific have also theorised the role colonization has played in influencing gender systems, roles, and relations in the region. Literature focusing on the impact of the western presence on indigenous societies dates back to the colonial era, and many of these earlier works, by mostly European anthropologists and ethnographers, have been heavily contested and criticised in the preceding decades. A classic example of the early Eurocentric and essentialising readings of Pacific life is the problematic legacy of Margaret Mead in Samoa (Abubakar, 2018). Mead's representation of Samoan women is reflective of how Pacific women have long been represented in essentialising ways, particularly in parts of Polynesia where women were characterised as sexually available, exotic and who enjoyed relative freedom within their societies (Taouma, 2007). On the other hand, in parts of Melanesia, women were often represented as ugly, sexually unappealing and oppressed by men (Jolly, 2007). Characterisations of men were equally reifying, with Pacific men commonly portrayed as strong, murderous, or as primitive savages (Jolly, 2008; Hokowhitu, 2004; Tengan, 2002; Walker, 2005). In their attempts to understand indigenous Pacific societies, and the impacts of colonization, these early anthropological works often contributed to harmful narratives and discourses of Pacific peoples (Hau'ofa, 1975; Trask, 1991; Uperesa, 2016).

More recently however, research disavowing such reductive analyses has shown how missionisation and colonization resulted in the marginalisation and criminalisation of non-heteronormative sexual and gender practices (Hall, 2009) and institutionalised patriarchal gender roles and relationships (Jolly & Macintyre, 1989; Merry, 2000). Christian missions were crucial agents in the process of Western colonization, and many were committed to a reordering of family life according to Western Christian values. The presence of missionaries in all parts of the Pacific, heavily impacted social organisation within indigenous societies (Rallu, 2018; Emberson-Bain, 1998; Ravuvu, 1988; Schoeffel, 1979). Scholars have highlighted how this resulted in the

eradication of sexually diverse and gender expressions (Hall, 2009; Jolly & Macintyre, 1989), the 'domestication' of indigenous women (Jolly, 1991; Burnett, 2002) whilst simultaneously affording indigenous men patriarchal power, albeit in a highly controlled way (Tengan, 2002; Jolly, 2008; Hokowhitu, 2004).

Pacific Feminisms

Feminist discussions and debates in the Pacific, also reveal the limits of Western gender theorizing in the region. The term 'feminist' remains a highly political one in the region and whilst there are many indigenous Pacific scholars, activists and politicians engaged in what be characterised as 'gender equality' work, many distance themselves from the label 'feminist' (Marsh, 1998; Naepi, 2016; George, 2010). The reasons for this vary, but often stem from an understanding that feminism is not all that relevant for Pacific contexts. Perhaps where this has been most strongly expressed is in the writings of decolonial Kanaka Maoli scholar, Huanani Kay Trask. Through what she has called the "feminist failure of vision" (1996, p. 911), Trask criticises the failure of Western feminists to recognise and actively engage in decentring Whiteness and colonial epistemologies in otherwise 'progressive' feminist projects (Trask, 1996). From her decolonial perspective, Western feminist approaches have not invested in decolonization and therefore offers little to the struggle of indigenous Hawaiian's. In other parts of the Pacific these views have also been expressed. In her earlier work, Ni-Vanuatu Political activist, and poet Grace Mera Molisa, expressed her anger at a feminist movement which refused to see its positionality, despite being embedded in a different and dominant political and social context, calling women's liberation a "European disease to be cured by Europeans" (as cited in Jolly, 1991, p. 6). Later in life however Mera Molisa increasingly embraced feminist values to oppose the way political elites would appropriate custom to the detriment of women (Jolly, 2005). These examples highlight that from a decolonial perspective, for feminism to be relevant in the Pacific it must be based on a recognition that colonial history in the region has had profound impacts on Indigenous people and has contributed to a worsening of women's status in contemporary society.

Discussions and debates around feminism in the Pacific also echo sentiments made by Lugones, Oweyumi and other Indigenous feminists, highlighting perhaps more salient factors for social

organization in the region. The growing emphasis on gender within development in the region has seen feminist discourses often ‘forced’ into debates, particularly when it comes to women in politics. In these conversations, the traditional world of custom and religion is constructed as patriarchal and the modern world of development, progressively feminist (Spark et al., 2021). When asked how it feels to be a feminist in Samoa, current Prime Minister Fiame Naomi Mata’afa replied,

> Well, you’re not a feminist in isolation, right. Whatever your beliefs are, the important things are how do you engage and interact. So, a really good Samoan Matai [chiefly titleholder] is probably one of the best feminists you’ll ever come across because he’s looking after his family and he’s making sure people reach their potential, people are engaged. When I see a really good Matai in action, and he utilises all the human resources at his fingertips, which include the women, then you can say he’s a great feminist (as cited in Spark et al., 2021, p. 64).

Throughout the interview, Fiame continues to strategically divert a series of feminist questioning back to an emphasis that development is not just for women, but for everyone. Fiame’s comments reflect sentiments of those in the region who are uncomfortable with labelling themselves and their work as being “feminist”. This could be attributed to the importance of kinship-oriented views in Pacific communities, that place an importance on relationships and interrelatedness with others (Marsh, 1998). From this perspective, Pacific women’s lives are often embedded within a complex series of social relations that go beyond gendered ones. Therefore, western feminisms emphasis on the individual rights of women, as opposed to a focus on relational identities and collectives, can be considered irrelevant in this context. As Underhill-Sem and co-authors explain, “In the Pacific, where gender relations sit at the intersections of other forms of relations considered by Pacific Islanders to be equally, if not more, important – for example, familial, generational, sociocultural, religious and political relations – meddling with one of these at the expense of the other is likely to produce resistance and non-cooperation’s” (2016, p. 25). These other forms of relations that Pacific women’s lives are embedded within also inform views that feminism for many in the region can never just be about women. Rather, as Nicole (2009) and Naepi (2016) illustrate in discussion with women in Fiji, questions of social justice are always linked to the wellbeing and development of the entire family or community.

Furthermore, notions of gender equality or the fight for equality have also been disputed by some Pacific women as this framing assumes that gender relations are universally oppressive (Marsh,

1998). Decolonial scholars point to how in parts of the Pacific, gender relations were complementary and egalitarian or in some instances women enjoyed more status in pre-colonial times due to other more salient factors for social organisation such as those mentioned above (Dudgeo & Bray, 2019; Kauanui, 2008; Meleisea, 1979). Although debates around feminism in the Pacific continue there is still a silence that looms large within these discussions. In their attempts to decolonise gender or to promote the status of women, feminist discussion often fails to challenge binary and heteronormative assumptions of gender in the region. In doing so, indigenous gender and sexually diverse identities can be marginalised within Pacific feminist spheres.

Pacific Queer Literature

Harmful views towards LGBTQIA+ communities are still present in the Pacific region. Indeed, homosexuality is still a punishable offence (Idris, 2021) and in the context of Kiribati, a regional human rights survey conducted in 19 Pacific countries, showed Kiribati ranked second to last on MVPFAFF+[2]/LGBTQIA+[3] people's right to freedom from violence (HRMI, 2021). Despite this, Indigenous Pacific scholars have shown how the surfacing of these harmful attitudes are tied to the same marginalising processes that sought to colonise and eradicate Indigenous peoples. Indigenous queer Pacific and wider scholars have effectively demonstrated how colonization sought to eliminate all forms of queerness or non-binary expressions within Indigenous communities (Driskill, 2011; Loh & Luther, 2019; Moreton-Robinson, 2020; Aikau, 2021; Hall, 2009). Indigenous queer theorizing points to the fluidity of gender in the Pacific and perhaps presents one of the most compelling challenges to heteronormative gender assumptions in the region. The recognition of these embodied experiences of queerness allows us to make visible the resistances and subjectivities made invisible through the coloniality of gender.

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[2] The term MVPFAFF+ was developed by community activist and worker Physlesha Brown-Acton to encourage and facilitate wider use of traditional Pacific terms such as mahu, vakasalewalewa, palopa, fa'afaine, akava'ine, fakaleity or leit, and fakafifine. Whilst the plus is intended to represent other traditional Pacific terms for diverse genders, including binabinaine (Kerekere, 2017).
[3] LGTBQIA+ are Western terms that refer to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer, asexual and other sexually or gender diverse people

Many Indigenous languages in the Pacific contain place-specific words that reflect the spiritual, social, and political positions of variously gendered people within different Pacific contexts (Thomsen & Brown-Acton, 2021). In a keynote address at the Asia-Pacific Outgames Conference in 2011, Phylesha Brown-Acton coined the abbreviation MVPFAFF+ pointing out that in the Pacific, Pacific peoples have always had their own ways of referring to experiences of queerness that are culturally distinct and are not to be viewed as synonymous with western gender and sexuality labels (Brown-Acton, 2011). Whilst Picq and Tikuna (2019) note Indigenous queerness can be rendered invisible through Western definition and translations arguing that Indigenous sexualities do not fit into confined Western conceptions of gender binaries, heterosexuality, or LGBT labels. In pointing to some of these differences, Thomsen (2016) notes that in the Pacific context, all aspects of identity are relationally defined, constructed through reciprocal relationships and interactions with social and natural objects. Thus, understanding diverse Pacific gender and sexualities, in their own contextual realities, reveals how Pacific peoples have long resisted colonial heteronormative imposition well before the contemporary Western LGBTQIA+ movement.

In the Kiribati context, literature around indigenous gender and sexually diverse practices is virtually non-existent. However, there are terms in the Kiribati language that describe nonheteronormative gender and sexual expressions. For instance, binabinaine is a recognised term to describe men who have sex with men (MSM) or gay, bisexual men and transgender women. It has been interpreted to mean a man who acts in the manner of a woman (BIMBA, 2015; Trussel & Groves, 1978). On the other hand, the word binabinamwane, refers to masculine woman (Trussel & Groves, 1978) and is a well-accepted term to describe lesbian, bisexual women and transgender men. Western terms such as LGBTQIA+ are foreign to the Kiribati context, yet those within this community are often highly stigmatised and vulnerable to violence, binabinaine in particular (Henrickson, 2020; HRMI, 2021). Little is known in the literature around the role of binabinaine in traditional Kiribati society. In conversations with Kiribati family members and friends, even after attending a Sexual and Gender diversity workshop in Tarawa (Henrickson, 2020), conversations around the role of binabinaine in traditional society practices are often met with much uncertainty. Yet, despite the silences within literature around the roles of binabinaine within Kiribati society, binabinaine nevertheless continue to play essential roles within the

community and family, assuming roles associated with women such as cooking, cleaning, and washing of clothes whilst also being asked to perform and entertain at community events (BIMBA, 2015). Binabinaine continue to make their identities visible within contemporary Kiribati society despite a silencing within history of their traditional roles. Furthermore, representation and recognition for the rights of the LGBTQIA+ community in Kiribati has grown in recent years particularly with the establishment of Boutokaan Inaomataia ao Mauriia Binabinaine Association (BIMBA) in 2016.

Conclusion

This chapter has introduced key theoretical concepts that inform the current research. In order to analyse the contradictory narratives of gender and culture in the Kiribati context, the thesis takes a decolonial approach. Informed by Latin American scholars, the thesis utilises the concept of coloniality to highlight how colonial systems and hierarchies continue to shape the life of 'contemporary' post-colonial societies. This chapter discusses the work of decolonial feminist Maria Lugones and her concept of the 'coloniality of gender', which argues that colonization imposed a new gender system onto indigenous societies, eradicating indigenous conceptualisations of gender and sexuality. This new gender system imposed patriarchal, heteronormative understandings of gender where perhaps more egalitarian and relational understandings existed – or according to some, no gender existed at all. The coloniality of gender is a relevant and useful concept for the current thesis, as it allows us to critically examine the way gender has been constructed in the Kiribati context. Whilst the colonial context in the Pacific differs vastly to the colonial experience in Latin America, the influence of colonization and Christianity impacted indigenous Pacific gender relations and sexual and gender identities. This is evident through Pacific feminist literature but also within the growing indigenous Pacific queer literature, disrupting and challenging such rigid binary understandings of gender. If gender as we know it today is a colonial construct, then this allows us to complicate narratives of gender that frame Kiribati culture as patriarchal. Just as important, the coloniality of gender also allows us to be critical of the various narratives that are used to justify harmful attitudes and practices towards women and members of LGBTQIA+ communities.

Chapter Three: Research Context and Methodology

Introduction

This chapter presents a discussion of the research context and the overall research methodology. Following this, the chapter will provide a description of the researcher's positionality. Situating the researcher within the research process is important for understanding the position the researcher is writing from and the kind of knowledge that is subsequently being produced. Next, I outline a research methodology that has been proposed for research working with I-Kiribati people, that is taona tabon inaim (Korauaba, 2012). This methodology provides an epistemological framework to guide fieldwork with I-Kiribati participants. Following this, I detail the collection of data and the methods used in this thesis. This includes gathering mostly secondary sources both text and audio-visual material as well as primary data from maroro, a Kiribati method akin to the Samoan, Tongan and Fijian research method of Talanoa. Finally, the chapter will conclude with a description of how the data has been analysed.

The Kiribati Context

The Republic of Kiribati is an atoll nation in the Central Pacific made up of thirty-three atoll and reef islands, scattered across two million square miles of ocean. Kiribati consists of three major groups; the Gilbert, Phoenix, and Line Islands with a total land area of 811 square kilometres, of which 10% is uninhabited (Storey & Hunter, 2010). The Phoenix and Line groups in the central part of the country and the east are more sparsely populated, with only Kiritimati, Teraina and Fanning (Line) having a permanent population other than Kanton and Orana. The isolated volcanic Banaba Island in the west of Kiribati has a small population of just 200. The capital Tarawa and the islet of Betio are the most populous and overcrowded islands.

Kiribati faces enormous development challenges, particularly on the main island of Tarawa. Kiribati is considered a low-income country by the World Bank and a least developed country by the United Nations, making Kiribati one of the poorest nations in the Pacific region (Webb, 2020). Although gaining political independence in 1979, a large proportion of the Kiribati economy comes from official development assistance over the years. In 2017, foreign aid contributed 48% (A$153m) to the government's programs, leading some to label Kiribati as one of the most aid-dependent countries in the world (Yates, 2020). Life on the main island of South Tarawa can be particularly challenging. With very little space to develop large scale agriculture and even small-scale food crops, households have very limited access to fresh fruit and vegetables. This, combined with a reliance on imported foods such as canned meat, rice and flour the spread of non-communicable diseases is a major issue.

Furthermore, the threat of climate change looms large and is already having direct impacts in Kiribati. All but one of the thirty-three islands in Kiribati are less than two meters above sea level and large parts of the country are expected to be underwater by 2050. Former Prescient Anote Tong, successfully raised global awareness of the climate crisis facing Kiribati and in 2017 was declared the world's most vulnerable country at the United Nationals Climate Change Conference in Bonn. Warming temperatures combined with frequent tidal storms and coastal flooding is having a devasting impact on the island ecosystems. Saltwater intrusion from storm surges and rising sea levels destroys land and property but also pollutes fresh drinking groundwater. Furthermore, the ability to grow local crops such as coconuts, pandanus and breadfruit is increasingly difficult (Teiawa, 2019).

It is within this context that issues of gender inequality are situated within Kiribati, and perhaps why momentum on issues of gender equality has been slow. In recent years, both the Government of Kiribati (GoK) and its development partners have begun to pay attention to gender issues. The publishing of findings from a 2010 gender-based violence study highlighted the prevalence of intimate partner violence in Kiribati, with 68% of women having experience intimate partner violence. This prompted the GoK to introduce a number of key government policies and action plans - the Elimination of Sexual and Gender Based Violence Policy and Action Plan 2011-21, Te Rau n Te Mwenga Act – Family Peace Act 2014 and the first ever Gender Equality and Women's

Development policy in 2019. Furthermore, the government establishment the Ministry of Women, Youth, Sports, and Social Affairs (MWYSSA) in 2014 to oversee and implement all government gender equality initiatives. The GoK has also made several regional and international commitments to gender equality through ratification of CEDAW, recognizing its obligations under the Sustainable Development Goal's as well as being a signatory to the Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration (PLGED) (GoK, 2019). The biggest regional gender commitment in the region to date has been through Australia's DFAT initiative, Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development (Pacific Women) which has invested $9.9 million dollars to Kiribati on initiatives supporting women's empowerment (Pacific Women, 2020).

Positionality

Critical to Indigenous and Pacific research is articulating one's relationship as researcher in and to their research (Tuhiwai-Smith, 2012). This is based on the recognition that researcher positionality influences all aspects of the research process from how research is designed to how data is interpreted, analysed, and presented. No part of knowledge-making in research is neutral or objective, rather research is intimately connected to the positionality of the researcher and ultimately shapes the knowledge that is consequently produced.

My ancestors hail from the islands of Beru and Onotoa in Kiribati on my mother's side, and England and Scotland on my father's side and I have spent a majority of my life in Aotearoa New Zealand. Thus, I hold a somewhat complex, and at times contradictory position, as a straight cis-woman of I-Kiribati and I-Matang descent navigating research within a Western academic institution.

From a Pacific perspective, *relationality,* or "the relationships that indigeneity makes possible" (Underhill-Sem, 2020, p. 318), is an integral aspect to how Pacific peoples view the world and their place within it. My indigeneity ties me to a specific place in the region and largely informs the research endeavours I have chosen to undertake and how I choose to do that research. Yet, as someone who grew up outside of Kiribati and who does not speak the language fluently, I am

constantly questioning my place as a researcher looking to conduct research on Kiribati issues. Just because I am of I-Kiribati descent does that qualify me to speak on issues that I did not directly grow up in or experience? Am I the right person to be talking about these issues? And am I, perhaps, inadvertently taking up space and pushing other Kiribati voices to the peripheries?

These questions continue to guide me as I undergo research endeavours, including this thesis. Whilst I identify as someone who is indigenous to Kiribati, that does not mean I am exempt from the work required of all researchers conducting research within indigenous spaces. I also bring to my research a range of my own values, beliefs and assumptions that have been shaped by my lived experiences. This informs my responsibility as a researcher to constantly engage in reflexivity throughout the research process. Rose (1997) argues it is not possible to completely know oneself well enough nor to know the full effects of our research completely, no matter how reflective we are. The best can do is be attuned to the uncertainties and power relations involved in research processes.

Therefore, as someone who claims to be a researcher of indigenous descent but has grown up in and received a tertiary education in a Western context, I'm very aware of how my engagement in the region, particularly in the current research, may perpetuate asymmetrical colonial relationships of power between those *doing the research* and the people and cultures *being researched*. It is from this position that I have chosen to, where possible, centre the use of indigenous Kiribati language, concepts, and methodologies throughout the research process. Lastly, the findings of this thesis do not claim to represent an authoritative indigenous Kiribati perspective. Just as diverse the entire Pacific region is, so too is there much diversity of thought and perspective within Kiribati and amongst I-Kiribati people, although we are often represented as a homogenous group. As much as possible, the current research has tried to incorporate the works and voices of I-Kiribati women (and men) scholars before me and hopefully this thesis will add to a growing body of diverse Kiribati perspectives.

Taona Tabon Inaim as an Indigenous Kiribati Methodology

Part of a decolonizing methodology in research calls for a (re)centring of indigenous worldviews and the use of indigenous methodologies and research methods (Tuhiwai-Smith, 2012). From this perspective, there is a need for research to be based on the interests of indigenous peoples, to support the rights of indigenous peoples and as much as possible, employ indigenous languages and concepts. Given the focus of the current research, this study relies on an indigenous Kiribati methodology of taona tabon inaim, borrowing from Korauaba's (2012) thesis to guide the engagement and interaction with participants through maroro, an I-Kiribati research method developed in Namoori-Sinclair's thesis (2020).

Taona tabon inaim refers to a Kiribati cultural practice used by families during special visits, to discuss sensitive matters. This can include for example, engagement arrangements between families, known as te kabutiman, and for the confession of any wrongdoings, te kabwarabure, or in this context conducting research with an I-Kiribati person. As such the practice of taona tabon inaim is used only in specific contexts, differentiating it from other casual social visits between families and friends. Normal, casual visits between family members and friends can occur at any time in a Kiribati context. There is no need to pre-plan a visit, and it is very normal and acceptable to have guests or visitors come and go unannounced. However, under taona tabon inaim, this kind of visit is organised and arranged. This is to reflect the importance and sensitivity of the purpose of the visit and by doing so, the visitor seeks peace and the blessing of the host family.

The concept of taona tabon inaim is useful for the current research as it informs and guides the creation of positive and respectful relationships between researcher and participant. The translation of taona tabon inaim literally means to sit on the edge of someone's mat. The mat or inai, is an important aspect of social life for many I-Kiribati. The mat represents the relationship between I-Kiribati, their home, and their economic and political status in society. To sit on the edge of an inai indicates you are adopting a low and humble position. As a researcher, implementing this notion involves attempting to position myself underneath and below the participants. In doing so I respect the position of the participants as producers of valuable and legitimate knowledge, in contrast to how data has often been collected in the past (Tuhiwai-Smith, 1999). Furthermore, taona tabon inaim is considered appropriate for the current research given my positionality as a young I-Kiribati woman, seeking to conduct research with older I-Kiribati

women. In Kiribati custom, age is an important marker of status and respect. Therefore, it is appropriate that I adopt a humble position when navigating these research relationships.

Data Collection and Analysis Methods

To explore the three main research questions, the current research relied on qualitative research methods in the collection of mostly secondary sources. The findings from secondary sources were further contextualised through primary data produced through maroro (discussion) with research participants. These data collection methods are discussed below.

Table 1: Research Questions, Methods Used and Data Collected

Research Question	**Research Method**	**Type of Data Collected**
RQ.1 – What are the colonial and political contexts in which understandings of gender have emerged in Kiribati?	Desk research Maroro	A mixture of grey and academic literature. Government reports Project reports UN official documents Academic articles/books/ Theses Primary data from maroro
RQ.2 – What understandings of gender do Pacific Women and Nei Tabera ni Kai work with?	Thematic analysis of documents and films Maroro	Grey literature and films. Pacific Women official documents, reports, evaluations, publications Nei Tabera ni Kai films, primary data from maroro
RQ.3 – To what extent do these initiatives resolve or	Thematic analysis of documents and films	Grey literature and films.

reproduce these contradictions?	Maroro	PWSPD official documents, reports, evaluations Nei Tabera ni Kai film series Primary data from maroro

Desk Research

Desk research refers to the sourcing of secondary material. In this case, desk research was employed to source textual material from archives and university databases to determine what various development initiatives with a gender focus have been brought into Kiribati over the last twenty years. To search for material the research utilised key search words related to Kiribati and gender projects, such as 'Kiribati', 'Gender' and 'Gender Inequality/Equality'.

Maroro

Given the decolonial methodology underpinning the current research, where possible indigenous research methods have been sought. Borrowing from Namoori-Sinclair's (2020) thesis, the current research also relies on an indigenous Kiribati research tool of maroro in the collection of primary data. The word maroro is akin to the Samoan, Tongan and Fijian concept of Talanoa*,* where two or more people have the opportunity to tell or share a story about their personal experiences in a particular setting or context. The rationale for using maroro as a research method is in an effort to commit to creating an open and free environment, guided by the concept of taona tabon inaim, for participants to share their knowledge and experiences in addressing the research questions.

It is also deemed suitable for the current research, as maroro in Kiribati contexts allows for an understanding of indirect speech. For example, in some parts of Kiribati, direct conversation can be considered rude and maroro can be laden with covert meanings which requires an understanding of the Kiribati language and context. In the Kiribati context, maroro can be conducted informally

or formally. Similar to the philosophy of Talanoa and other indigenous research methods, te maroro is an open dialogue allowing people to talk from their hearts without any preconceptions.

The research held one-on-one maroro with five members of the Kiribati community. All of whom were well-established experts in gender-related fields, either in Kiribati or with diasporic Kiribati communities in Aotearoa New Zealand. Participants were recruited through purposeful sampling (Palinkas et al., 2015) based on the researcher's own networks and connections within the Kiribati community in Aotearoa New Zealand and in Kiribati. Given the COVID-19 context at the time of the research, all maroro were all held online. A participant information sheet and consent form were sent to participants prior to maroro which can be viewed in Appendix C. Consent was verbally recorded prior to the start of each maroro. Verbal consent was considered appropriate for the current research given that access to printers and scanners, or technology to sign and send back documents can be difficult, especially for maroro held with participants based in Kiribati.

During maroro with each gender expert, issues of gender inequality in Kiribati and understandings of culture and gender were discussed. Experts shared their understandings of gender and discussed their professional engagement with gender work in country, as well as sharing their cultural expertise around such issues. Once maroro were held, the researcher transcribed the maroro and sent it back to each gender expert. All five experts were happy with the transcribed maroro and did not make any changes. When it came to the analysis of data from maroro, the research coded the transcripts according to the research questions. Findings from maroro were used to further contextualise or contest findings from the document and film analysis. Pseudonyms in place of real names have been used for all quotes taken from maroro and used in the thesis. This is to ensure anonymity of the research participants, given the small size of the Kiribati community in Aotearoa New Zealand and in Kiribati itself. All transcripts and consent forms were kept on a secure online cloud that only the accessible to the researcher.

Data Collection and Thematic Analysis of Documents and Films

The research collected textual and audio-visual secondary sources to carry out a thematic analysis of project documents and films. To explore what understandings of gendered social relations the

Pacific Women programme works with, the research drew on grey material in the form of official project documents, reports, evaluations, and publications. These documents were sourced from the Pacific Women and DFAT websites. The research also sought to analyse how NTNK worked with understandings of gender by drawing on three films within a five-part NTNK film series called te ribana. Te ribana is a film series that covers a range of social issues in in Tarawa, Kiribati including domestic abuse, alcoholism, romantic relations, and positive parenting among others. Whilst initially intending to view all five films, disruptions to field work caused by civil disruption in Wellington meant the researcher was unable to access the films contained within the National Archives. Thus, only those that were available on YouTube were used in the research.

Following the collection of secondary sources, both textual and audio visual, the research relied on Braun and Clark's (2022) step by step description of using 'thematic' analysis in research. Thematic analysis refers to a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns within data. It is a useful method for organizing and describing data in rich detail. Braun and Clark (2022) argue that thematic analysis in qualitative research is widely used but often not explicitly claimed as the method of analysis. Not knowing how people go about analysing data, or what assumptions inform their analysis, can make it difficult to evaluate that research but also contributes to longstanding colonial practices of research that claim neutrality and objectivity in the knowledge they subsequently produce (Tuhiwai-Smith, 2012). The current research takes a decolonial approach to research that argues knowledge-making is never objective but is always informed through the researcher's own positionality. The researcher always takes an active role in identifying patterns and themes within data, themes do not simply "emerge". Thus, it is vital to provide clarity on the processes and practices of method, which I have detailed below.

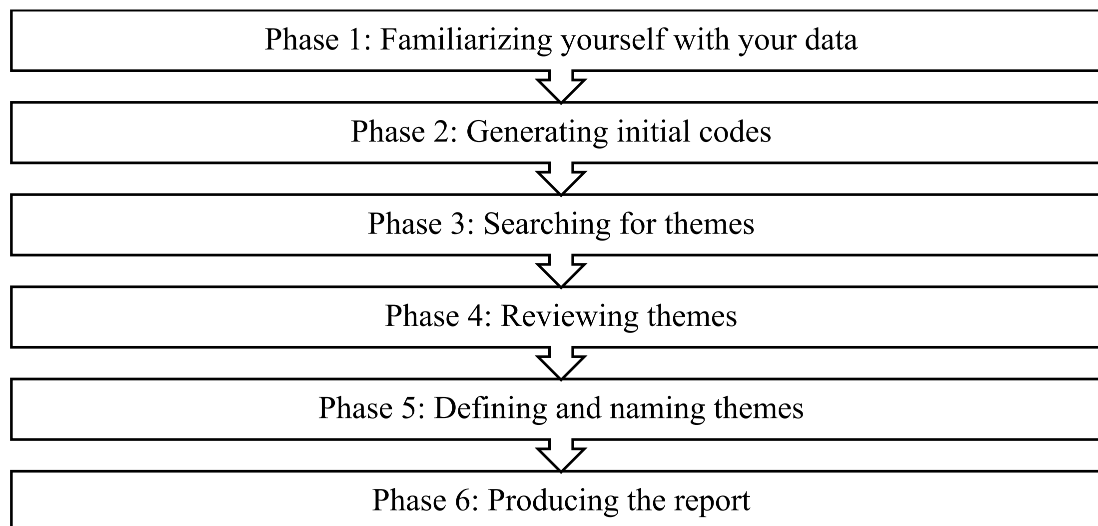

Figure 1: Phases of thematic analysis (Braun & Clark, 2022)

Project documents

The research conducted a search of Pacific Women documents available on the Pacific Women website. The key search word 'Kiribati' was used to source all Pacific Women documents pertaining to the Pacific Women Kiribati Country Programme. Once the documents were sourced, the documents were thoroughly reviewed to identify those that made reference to gender inequality and culture in Kiribati. Afterwards, selected documents were manually coded by highlighting text sections and labelling them with short 'codes. In turn, the identified codes were categorised into themes pertaining to various narratives of gender and culture.

NTNK films

A similar process was employed when it came to the analysis of films. Following an initial viewing of the films, a written scene-by-scene summary of each of the films was created. The written summaries were then coded by highlighting various scenes and labelling them with short 'codes. After each film summary was coded, all identified codes were categorised into themes using a 'theoretical thematic analysis', with categorised themes relating to research questions two and three.

Gaps and limitations

Overall, this chapter has demonstrated the key methodological underpinnings of the current research. By taking a decolonial approach, I have positioned myself within the current research. As someone who identifies as being part I-Kiribati, and thus of Indigenous descent. my indigeneity informs the way I choose to do research, where possible centring indigenous Pacific perspectives, voices, and concepts. The interactions between research participants have been guided by the concept of taona tabon inaim, which requires a humbling of oneself below those whom you are seeking to do research with. Through maroro, a Kiribati research method, the research has sought to hold a culturally respectful and safe space for five I-Kiribati women to discuss their extensive experience working in gender-related fields and their cultural knowledge around gender inequality issues.

Part of fully considering one's positionality in the research also requires reflecting on the gaps and limitations of the study. Not being fluent in the Kiribati language, meant that all of the maroro were undertaken in the English language. Whilst all of the women whom I spoke with were fluent English-speakers, research that claims to be decolonial is limited when conducted in the language of the 'coloniser'. English terminology and language are limited in its ability to represent or speak to Indigenous epistemologies. Thus, during maroro at times, some women found it difficult to explain I-Kiribati concepts in English. I also acknowledge the limitation of my own understandings of I-Kiribati knowledge given my lack of fluency.

Furthermore, the COVID-19 context, time limitations and disruptions to research fieldwork presented major challenges to the research that took place. The research took place during multiple lockdown periods in Auckland, New Zealand. The longest being four months. This meant all maroro were conducted online via zoom, which proved difficult when trying to talk to those based in Kiribati where internet connection can be unreliable. Further disruptions to fieldwork in Wellington, meant that I was not able to access all five films of the *Te Ribana* series, which might have provided more insight to the current research.

Due to these gaps and limitations, I acknowledge that this thesis fails to represent a full picture or account of how and why particular narratives of culture and gender emerge in Kiribati. Nor do I claim the findings in thesis are an authoritative decolonial voice on conceptualisations of gender and culture in the Kiribati context. Rather this thesis aims to centre Kiribati perspectives and voices before me and contribute to a growing body of diverse I-Kiribati perspectives and thought.

Chapter Four: The Kiribati Colonial Context and Gender Discourses

Introduction

There are significant contradictions in the way that gender and culture in Kiribati are understood. Central to these contradictions is an absence in the literature of attention to the nation's colonial past. As demonstrated in Chapter Two, elsewhere in the Pacific region colonization and missionisation were founded upon a reordering of family and social life. This has been the focus of decolonial feminist and queer Pacific scholars who call for a decolonizing around notions of gender, arguing that contemporary gender inequities cannot be separated from this colonial past (see Chapter Two). In maroro with research participants when asked what role colonization has played in changing gender roles and relations, many were uncertain. This could be in part because most of Kiribati's colonial past has been written by non-I-Kiribati, for example, former colonial administrators like Arthur Grimble and Harry Maude. Indigenous women's perspectives have largely been excluded from Kiribati's written histories. Key scholars within the field of Pacific Studies have problematised such academic endeavours of reconstructing the past (Linnekin, 1992). The way in which the Pacific history has been written about has worked to further perpetuate damaging and belittling views about the region (Hau'ofa, 2008). As a researcher, my understandings of the colonial past in Kiribati are limited to the resources I am able to access and thus the conclusions I have drawn from these texts are also bound up within my own positionality (see Chapter Two). Much of the historical literature that is available is written from the perspectives of former colonial agents (for example see the works of Arthur Grimble and Harry Maude) and more recently, through doctoral theses (see, for example Uriam, 1999; Burnett, 2002; Rose, 2014). The colonial past of Kiribati is more than what is contained in official archives or textbooks and what this thesis is able to retell. Nevertheless, this chapter will discuss aspects of how the colonial context in Kiribati institutionalised European Christian values into family and social life, and in particular confined women to the domestic sphere.

Missionisation, schooling and female domesticity

Some of the earliest texts that provide us with insights into how gender has been constructed in the context of Kiribati, are the journal entries of early European missionaries. Like elsewhere in the Pacific, early European contact began with the arrival of missionaries. In the context of Kiribati this began with the arrival of Dr George Pierson and Hiram Bingham. Sent by the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM) in 1855, Pierson and Bingham were to survey and observe the suitability of Kiribati for a possible missionisation (Burnett, 2002). During their early visits the missionaries kept and recorded logs and journals of their experiences in Kiribati that would inform the basis of a permanent missionary presence, and a precursor for an eventual colonial presence. Their descriptions of I-Kiribati marked the beginning of a colonial, European discourse of Kiribati people and Kiribati culture.

Unlike the way European conquistadors racialised indigenous peoples in Latin America in animal and beastlike ways (Lugones, 2010), early missionaries racialised I-Kiribati in child-like ways justifying a paternal missionary presence, and an eventual colonial presence. Informed by dominant scientific paradigms of that time, early missionaries employed racial scientific methods to draw conclusions about the types of people they came across, based solely on physical appearance. In their journals they defined I-Kiribati people by the physical characteristics of their bodies including terms such as 'countenance', 'nudity', 'sprightly appearance' and 'high foreheads' (Burnett, 2002, p. 58). This process of racialised subjectification constructed I-Kiribati as lacking or devoid of similar attributes, mental, physical, and moral, to the more civilised, advanced European. This is particularly evident in the quote below, taken out of Bingham's journal.

> If you would paint [a picture] of the Micronesian, you must give him a *dark skin, here copper, there olive*, you must make his *hair straight and black*, you must make his *eyes black* also ... The people of this group cannot understand the language of another; but the missionaries find that many words are common to all the groups. The unconverted Micronesians are *all liars*. The *fathers lie, the mothers lie, and the children lie*. Indeed, they seem just as ready to deceive as to speak the truth. They are much *disposed to steal*, moreover. They steal from one another, from the ships which visit them, and frequently from missionaries who live among them. In their way *they are covetous*. They *know very little* about nice houses, railroads, bank stocks, fine horses, and fine clothes; but they are greedy of fishhooks, tobacco, plane irons, large knives, scented oils, and beads. They often *treat their women with great cruelty*, beating them,

> stabbing them, making slaves of them. The little children for the most part, have much kindness shown to them; but I am sorry to say that *they do not honour their fathers and mothers*. And I will add that very *little respect is paid to old people*. They generally treat strangers kindly, offering food and drink to those who call on them. (Bingham, 1907, p. 12)

According to Edward Said's (1978) well known colonial critique, representations of Indigenous peoples such as these were common throughout the colonial empire and were used by the colonisers for their own self-identity work and to justify their colonizing presence amongst Indigenous peoples. Such deficit thinking also worked to erase the multifaceted nature of I-Kiribati people. I-Kiribati epistemology, ontology and culture were made invisible through the missionaries' descriptions and conceptions of the physical I-Kiribati body. Thus language, dress standards, housing, eating habits, knowledge and morality were either considered inferior or non-existent. Through this process of racialisation, the early missionaries made sure to deny I-Kiribati their agency. Often depicted and framed as children, I-Kiribati were not capable of rational thought nor living civilised lives. However, given the right training and the correct education, they could be groomed or reformed. The quest of these early missionaries was thus to protect the spiritual welfare of I-Kiribati and to promote their moral, social, and mental development. One of the keyways in which they did this was through the establishment of formal schooling. These schools were in the hands of the ABCFM and other missionary organisations such as the LMS and those of the Catholic church for over 60 years. In fact, religious missions had a monopoly on education in Kiribati until 1920 when the British Colony Education Department was established (Talu, 1993).

Whilst the missionaries were concerned with the spiritual welfare of I-Kiribati, there is evidence to suggest that missionaries were also driven by other motives. Across the region, prior to contact with European colonisers, Pacific Island communities encompassed various expressions of sexuality and gender identities, as described in Chapter Two. Irreconcilable with the heteronormative and patriarchal characteristics of European Christian gender norms, many indigenous practices were deemed abject and immoral. Early missionaries took it on as their mission to reform these aspects of indigenous Pacific life (Rallu, 2018; Norton, 2004; Jolly & Macintyre, 1989). In the context of Kiribati, the existence of diverse sexual practices and gender roles unlike their own, we're also met with unease or misunderstanding by early missionaries, and this eventually resulted in an active effort to transform these practices or ban them altogether.

An early encounter with Bingham reveals the ways gender relations in Kiribati were perceived by missionaries. In a memoir, a wood cut image of Bingham depicts himself with a spy glass and with his wife Clarissa by his side looking across the lagoon. In front of them is an image of an I-Kiribati man and woman that does not sit quite right with Bingham. The woman is depicted pulling her husband, seated in a canoe, through the lagoon shallows and in his own words, the accompanying text reads 'little does he care how hard she must toil beneath the burning sun to tow him, as if she were a mule or a donkey' (Bingham, 1907 p. 40). The woodcut image and accompanying text reveal glimpses of the way the Bingham's, and indeed missionaries at that time, viewed I-Kiribati gendered social relations. It was their mission to save the seemingly oppressed I-Kiribati women from the arduous and labour-intensive life of such a primitive culture, a discourse it can be argued continued into the post-independence era. A society where women were capable of and involved in hard physical labour would not have sat well with the vision European missionaries had for Christian life in Kiribati.

It should be noted that many I-Kiribati expressed a disinterest or outright refusal to accept Christianity, and it took a great deal of effort before I-Kiribati converted to the new religion (Kirata, 1984; Macdonald, 2001). I-Kiribati were not passive witnesses to the process of missionisation that took place, but often negotiated and resisted these processes in varying ways. Anecdotes from the period of European colonisation, reveal controversial feelings among I-Kiribati regarding the profound changes to their lifestyle and cultural traditions. Uakeia (2016) notes that I-Kiribati became divided in their beliefs, causing hatred towards the foreigners by some due to introduction of new diseases by colonisers. On the other hand, some I-Kiribati intentionally capitalised on their interactions with Europeans, a few examples include in learning how to read and write in Kiribati, receiving new tools and skills from traders and missionaries (Uakeia, 2016; Macdonald, 2001). In one instance, Kaiea, a chief from Abaiang took advantage of relationships with missionaries for his own political gain (Rennie, 1989). Whilst it took a while before the Christian missions were well established in Kiribati, once the missionaries had secured the protection of island authorities, unimwane, traditional priests or high chiefs, they 'launched an assault on any vestiges of 'heathenish' belief or behaviour' (Macdonald, 2001 p. 45). Dancing and singing were banned (Xavier, 1976), sacred objects were reappropriated in profane ways or were destroyed. In Arorae for example, sacred stones were smashed, and ancestral skulls kept in houses

or maneaba, were buried followed by the demolition of shrines (Itaia, 1980). Infanticide, abortion, and all sexual relationships that existed outside the confines of Christian standards presented one of the most contentious issues between custom and Christianity. Sexual practices such as tinaba and eiriki relationships[4], together with polygamy were attacked by the mission. Resistances to these new laws and restrictions occurred throughout the colonial period, but none the less contributed to a narrative that framed Kiribati customs and traditions as primitive and immoral.

Education and schooling became a key means for missionaries to institutionalise their Christian visions and beliefs, and eventually the colonial administration who took over schooling in Kiribati. Education was one of the key strategies colonisers employed to control and subjugate I-Kiribati people in the colony, ensuring a particular gender order and colonial hierarchy (Burnett, 2002). The establishment of the classroom and the mission compound separated I-Kiribati from their own indigenous knowledge and knowledge making environments (Teaero, 2002). Curricula taught in these new schools were mostly theological in context and refused to recognise local knowledge. Rather, anything associated with Kiribati culture was often relegated to being 'things of darkness' or 'bwai n te roo'. This narrative remains an enduring colonial legacy, with many still referring to certain aspects of Kiribati custom as being things of darkness (Mere, personal communication, 2022).

In the late 1800s, the ABCFM with the help of Hawaiian missionaries and eventually I-Kiribati graduates established village schools, mission day schools and training schools on Butaritari and Makin in the north and in all islands south to Tabiteuea. Although the missionaries did not dictate who could attend, the schools promoted very rigid gender roles. Through the reports of various mission staff, this gendering was made clear with male students often referred to in the potential they showed for mission work, for example 'good preacher', whereas female students were often only referred to in relation to their husbands (Burnett, 2002). Mission schools had a clear agenda to groom I-Kiribati women for the role of domestic helpmates to their husbands, whilst they were to become pastors or hold roles in the Church.

[4] Tinaba and eiriki refer to customary relationships that sometimes led to sexual practices. An eiriki relationship was between a man's sisters-in-law. Sometimes a wife's younger sister's would accompany her as concubines to her husband and to assist in the household. Whilst a tinaba relationship existed between a man and his son's wives. Under tinaba, a sexual relationship could occur when a gift was involved (Macdonald, 2001).

The Colonial Administration, Schooling and Gender Hierarchies

By the turn of the century, LMS schools and the now official Gilbert and Ellice Island (GEIC) colonial administration[5] reinforced the gender roles imposed by American missionaries' decades prior. The 1920s ushered in a new era of education, marked by direct government intervention into an otherwise mission-controlled system of formal schooling (Burnett, 2002). During this new era, gender discourses of female domesticity remained but education as a tool for producing men and women to serve the colony was made more explicit. Three government schools were established during this time but were male orientated and restricted to boys only. Schooling for girls remained the responsibility of mission schools and had a clear aim to produce suitable marriage partners for 'educated' men attending the government schools, as the following statement from a colonial education officer to the Resident Commissioner suggests.

> He [the educated male] would return to find, for his wife, a girl who could speak English, who could care for his home and keep it clean as the school in which he was educated, a girl moreover who would be, by her training, a real companion, a fit mother. (Holland et al, 1923, p. 3)

The low attendance of girls at the mission schools was often used as a justification to dismiss any ideas of including girls in formal government schooling. Schooling for girls in Kiribati in the early 1900s largely reflected earlier thinking that any intellectual development of women was detrimental to their reproductive role. Many in the Colonial administration continued to operate with the same objectives as the missionaries' decades earlier. The LMS openly admitted to aims of domesticity and eventual marriage in the running of the mission school at Rongorongo established by William Goward in 1900.

May Pateman, an LMS missionary in the 1930s and 40s in official colony reports revealed significant mission attitudes toward I-Kiribati females and the purposes of mission education at that time. Pateman reports that the Rongonrongo school for girls, the only secondary education for Protestant girls, was not so much for education but to further matrimonial ambitions. She goes on to call the school a 'Matrimonial Bureau' that 'produces well-favoured, comely lassies who find

[5] The Gilbert and Ellice Island Colony was the official name of the British colony and included what is now Kiribati, Tuvalu and for a time also included Tokelau.

favour in the eyes of the young gallants of the Gilberts' (Pateman 1941, p. 29). Curriculum statements also emphasised the girl's future role of a marriage partner but also included the role of mother. Women attending the school were destined to be good wives and mothers, and therefore;

> The chief concern was to try and give them the kind of education which will make them into good homebuilders… that our girls should be able to do everything that a Gilbertese woman should be able to do…capable of making their humble little huts into clean Christian homes (Pateman, 1941, p. 29)

The curriculum presented to the girls reinforced notions that the I-Kiribati woman's role should be confined to the domestic sphere, this colonial gendering of women was evident in other parts of the Pacific (Jolly, 1991). This vision of I-Kiribati womanhood and indeed by extension, that of the I-Kiribati family, followed the modelling of missionaries' decades prior. The I-Kiribati woman's role was one of wife, alongside and one step back from her husband. These views and means of imparting Eurocentric-gender roles and family structures continued well into the 1920s and 30s.

In the post-war context, the vital role of education in sustaining the colony through the production of gendered roles was made much more explicit. New Resident Commissioner, Harry Maude, viewed education as having an integral role in fostering political stability. Education for him after the fall of the Japanese occupation in Tarawa was vital to ensure that certain views and ideologies around governance and nation building were planted in the minds of the colony's future leaders. In part to achieve this, Maude had a desire to provide tertiary education opportunities for I-Kiribati men, but only for a very select few. The decision to provide tertiary education to a select few I-Kiribati men was less about building the capacity of I-Kiribati but more about ensuring colonial control and hierarchies. Maude began sending a select number of I-Kiribati men to university in New Zealand with the intention that they would be the ones to eventually replace Europeans in senior posts. However, Maude was very careful not to dismantle the colonial hierarchical order. In a post-war planning document, Maude notes:

> It should be emphasised that the Government, by virtue of the fact that it controls the number of natives being educated to any particular stage, is in a position to prevent any possibility of the growth of unemployed intelligentsia who might, as in other countries, prove a fertile source of discontent (Maude, 1945, p. 19)

The fear of an uprising by intelligent 'natives' fuelled motives to highly control the education of I-Kiribati. Those selected to be trained overseas were often the children of those who had been selected to attend the government schools' decades earlier. This effectively created a hierarchy of knowledge with those limited to primary schooling and mission schools placed at the bottom, most of these being women. Through the establishment of overseas tertiary education pathways, Maude was complicit in establishing a local I-Kiribati elite. This gendered hierarchy of knowledge and power simultaneously entrenched the status of girls and women to the domestic sphere.

Even with the establishment of the Elaine Bernacci School (EBS) for girls in 1959 (Talu, 1993) there was a very clear directive from the colonial administration that the education for girls was to achieve an entirely different purpose than for those attending the King George V (KGV) school for boys. Again, the purpose for educating girls was framed in discourses of female domesticity as seen in the same post-war document written by Maude. The purpose of education was;

> Not only to provide girls suitable for vocational training as nurses and teachers, and wives for graduates of the boys' school and others who proceed for higher training abroad, but also to ensure that some of the principles taught shall be handed down to the next generation by home example and instruction (Maude, 1945, p. 18).

There was a very clear gendered vision for the roles I-Kiribati men and women were to have. Kiribati women were to assume roles that found meaning in relation to their future male counterparts and to the children these partnerships were assumed to bear. Women's roles were clearly to be refined to the domestic sphere and references to 'the next generation' and 'home instruction' ensured these ideas would be sustained for further generations. In contrast, a carefully curated local male elite would take up senior leadership positions in the colony, ensuring the gendered colonial order. Furthermore, where girls were educated for employment in the colony it was mostly for service roles where the reproduction of colonial order would most likely be maintained such as nurses or schoolteachers.

Homemaker's Clubs and Liberal 'Feminist' Discourses

By the late 1950s, humanitarian developments within the newly formed South Pacific Commission (SPC) called for women's interests to be recognised on the regional Pacific agenda. This saw the establishment of a Women's Interests Project to involve Pacific women in 'raising the standard of

life in home and local community through a programme of education and an experience of voluntary organization through women's clubs' (Gwilliam, 1961 p. 1). The British Colonial Administration, a founding member of the SPC, began to apply this to the informal education of women in the GEIC. Although colonial policy acknowledged that women were to have a legitimate role in the gradual shift toward Kiribati self-determination, it would largely remain in the domestic sphere. In the same way colonial administrators would selectively choose I-Kiribati men to be trained overseas, I-Kiribati women were deliberately chosen and sponsored to be 'agents of change', although within the confines of what was deemed suitable by the colonial administration (Rose, 2014). The select few I-Kiribati women chosen to spearhead this new 'women's interest' movement resulted in the establishment of a network of women's Homemaker Clubs. This colonial-administered women's movement resulted in two I-Kiribati women participating in colonial governance[6] and increased engagement of I-Kiribati women in local community development. However, women's empowerment was only afforded to a select few indigenous 'elite' women and was still largely informed by discourses of domesticity which can be traced back to the early colonial period.

From the onset, women's development in the Pacific region was heavily influenced by Church affiliation. This was seen with the establishment of a regional SPC Women's Interest Officer, Miss Marjorie Stewart, funded by the United Church Women of the USA (SPC Research Council, 1961 p. 9). Strong links to Churches meant that during the years leading up to Independence in 1979, and in the years after, women's interests were largely informed by Christian ideology and Western values on gender. Much of the focus on programs and activities during this time was on training indigenous women on how to be a good Christian mother and wife, which saw an increase in health programs for women on nutrition, diet, and maternal and child health care. This emphasis on health education and home economics was also supported by wider international development organizations at the time, such as by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) through the provision of technical assistants and funding for training centres and regional seminars (Read, 1961; Gwilliam, 1961)

[6] Katherine Tekanene from 1965 to 1967 and Tekerei Russel frm 1971 to 1977.

Key I-Kiribati women were selected to facilitate and spread this new women's movement. Rose (2014) characterises the women selected as being 'border dwellers', more specifically, those who had education or experience abroad, or an educated elite, and therefore were on the periphery of Indigenous society. These border dwellers would ensure that values and systems imposed by the colonial administration would remain in the new independent state. One of these border dwellers, I-Kiribati woman Katherine Tekenene played a key role in the formation of Women's Homemaker Clubs alongside Marjorie Stewart, the regional Pacific Women's Interest Officer. Katherine Tekenene was the wife of a well-respected I-Kiribati doctor, Bwebwentekaai Tekenene, and having grown up in Fiji, was fluent in both English and Kiribati. Katherine self-proclaimed herself as 'not really Gilbertese in [her] way of thinking' (as cited in Rose, 2014 p. 97) and after forming a friendship with Elaine Bernacchi, the Resident Commissioner's wife, Katherine was nominated to attend the 1961 SPC Women's Training Seminar in Apia, Samoa. Following her return from the conference in Apia, Katherine Tekanene was tasked with the assignment of implementing the ideas shared at this conference into the Kiribati context.

Despite Tekanene's role in establishing the first Homemaker's club, at that time the colonial administration saw it necessary to employ large numbers of expatriates to train islanders to take over positions held by Europeans (Rose, 2014). As such the colony still looked to employ an expatriate Women Education Officer for the GEIC. In 1965, British expatriate Mrs Roddy Cordon was appointed as the Women Education Office for the Colony to support the policy of a formalised women's interests' program. Based on excerpts from reports and notes herself, Cordon's vision of women's liberation and empowerment at this time was mired in imperialism. She increasingly saw it as her duty to empower I-Kiribati women from what was considered 'primitive' Kiribati tradition and custom, in often aggressive and at times demeaning ways.

Cordon was very vocal in voicing her support for I-Kiribati women to be more active in civil society noting that I-Kiribati women were 'member citizens of the Colony ... entitled to all territorial rights, including being able to vote' (Roddy, 1971, p. 5). Despite these grand visions, in Cordon's view the current state of women in Kiribati was very lacking. In several statements, Cordon tended to view I-Kiribati women as having small mental horizons and lacked the capacity to comprehend such progressive ideas. In an article written for the South Pacific bulletin she notes:

> What is interesting to people who have never been so far inland that they cannot see the sea, have no idea of a river, a hill, a canal, a railway, have no birds that sing, have seen no animals other than cats, rats, and dogs? (Cordon 1970, p. 39).

In the same article, Cordon regarded the language spoken by Kiribati women as inadequate for the task of explaining the complexities of women's development when she posed the following question: 'How can you translate abstract ideas if the language you are using has words for only limited concrete matters?' (Cordon 1970, p. 39). This framing of I-Kiribati women echoes the sentiments made by missionaries' decades earlier who often framed I-Kiribati as mentally and morally lacking. Furthermore, in newsletters sent out to members of the Homemakers clubs, Cordon would assert very Eurocentric ideals around parenting and motherhood onto I-Kiribati women, "a tired child cannot learn well, because he cannot give his whole mind to it. So, parents who really care for their children see to it that they are in bed and asleep by a reasonable time each night" (as cited in Rose, 2014, p. 136) or in another example, "If your children don't ask questions - ask yourself why. Are they ill? Sick children aren't curious. Are they undernourished? Or too well fed with the wrong foods? Are you bringing them up to seek knowledge and wisdom? If not, why not?" (As cited in Rose, 2014, p. 135), Cordon's "feminism" and the ideals espoused around gender at this time were less emancipatory in the lives of I-Kiribati women than they were complicit with colonial rule in Kiribati.

It is worth noting however that the Homemakers clubs and the wider women's interest movement played a significant role in paving the way for women's leadership and in solidifying networks of women's groups across Kiribati. These networks of women's groups are still active today, particularly those with faith-based affiliations and continue to lead community development. The influence of Homemakers clubs and larger women's interest program also saw two I-Kiribati women participate in colonial governance, Katherine Tekanene from 1965 to 1967 and Tekerei Russel from 1971 to 1977 (Burnett, 2002). The role that I-Kiribati women played in advancing women's interests within this colonial administered program should not be discounted. However, the Homemaker's clubs as well as European expatriates at the time such as Mrs Roddy Cordon, worked to further institutionalise notions of female domesticity. Women's empowerment at this time was bound up by Cordon's own liberal 'feminist' visions. From the outset, the Women's Interest movement in Kiribati was heavily affiliated to Churches in the region. The interests of women were heavily aligned with Eurocentric ideals of being a good mother and being a good

Christian. Although it is argued that 'border dweller' women were able to negotiate 'custom' because of these newly carved out women's spaces, these spaces were still very colonial in nature. Western liberal notions further informed views that I-Kiribati women needed 'saving' from their primitive and patriarchal traditional culture, blind to the ways that the Homemaker's clubs themselves were reinforcing a colonial and patriarchal view of Indigenous women. The I-Kiribati women afforded empowerment in these new spaces were limited to the educated 'elites', uplifted to positions of leadership for 'not being like the Gilbertese'. Fluent in English and having been exposed to the outside world, these women were seen as more suited as change makers for empowerment and liberation than the local women of outer islands Cordon referred to as having small mental horizons. For these women, the Homemaker's clubs would ensure their place in the new independent state as good Christian wives and mothers.

Summary

This section has highlighted the discourses of female domesticity that have been prevalent throughout Kiribati's colonial history, and which also found their way into political independence. Various colonial agents, from Early European missionaries to colonial administration senior staff, through to expatriate women working in the colony in the 1960s, have all been implicit in imparting their own notions of womanhood and gender roles heavily influenced by heteronormative, patriarchal understandings. What I have attempted to establish throughout this chapter is the subtle strategies of the colonial administration in Kiribati to negate I-Kiribati epistemologies and ways of being. In contrast to settler colonial states such as Aotearoa New Zealand, Australia and Canada, the colonial experience in Kiribati occurred in a much less obvious way. Using education and schooling, as opposed to violent warfare, rape and murder, colonial agents in Kiribati were able to establish a gendered and racialised colonial order. I-Kiribati men and women were infantilised and given very rigid, gendered pathways for development. The formal education of I-Kiribati men only worked to create a separate class of indigenous elites who replaced the European colonisers in the emerging independent nation state. Simultaneously, the denial of education for Kiribati women until the latter half of the twentieth century worked to further entrench notions of female domesticity, as well as an accepted norm of female immobility. Men were permitted to travel and to lead, whereas women were to be confined to the house except for a few hand-picked I-Kiribati 'border-dweller' women. Simultaneously, Kiribati culture and

custom were relegated to things of darkness, bain te roo, or primitive and oppressive to women. Whilst it is unclear to what extent pre-colonial Kiribati society may be considered ‘patriarchal’ (given that much of what has been written has been from the perspective of outsiders), it can be argued that colonial patriarchy in Kiribati certainly entrenched the hegemony of heteronormative gendered understandings.

Chapter Five: Regional and International Gender Equality Frameworks

Introduction

The research so far has established the ways gender has been used as a tool for colonial domination and classification in Kiribati. From early missionaries to the colonial administration and the liberal versions of emancipation of European women, a particular gender system has been established that (re)orders indigenous Kiribati society whilst entrenching notions that Kiribati culture is primitive and oppressive. Through the notion of coloniality, we can understand that colonial systems continue to play a role in shaping contemporary gender relations, well into the so-called 'post-colonial' era. Towards the end of the twentieth century and well into the so called 'postcolonial' context, a focus on women's empowerment continues, increasingly informed by Feminist movements and theories in the global north (Connell, 2014). Yet as the previous chapters have established, global structures and systems are not innocent of the *colonial matrices of power/coloniality of powe*r (Lugones, 2007). In the last thirty years, Kiribati has heavily relied on international aid and development, and with this comes the accompanying discourses. As a newly independent nation, Kiribati has had to engage with international human rights commitments to receive aid which in the 1990s, coincided with the rise of feminism and women's rights within development discourse. Since then, various regional and national gender equality initiatives and frameworks have been introduced to Kiribati, along with challenges and debates regarding the effectiveness of their implementation in Kiribati contexts. This next chapter will outline the introduction of and various shifts in modern gender discourses in Kiribati over the last thirty years and the accompanying initiatives that have taken place. This will be important for contextualizing the work of Pacific Women and NTNK in the proceeding chapters. Overall, this chapter highlights how colonial discourses of gender and culture have continued in international aid and development in Kiribati.

The Rise of 'Gender Equality' Discourses in Development in the Pacific

Feminism ushered in an important shift amongst development practitioners and within the field of development studies itself. Feminist theorizing has contributed greatly to the various strategies, approaches, and policies within development praxis. In the early days, what came to be known as the 'Women in Development' (WID) paradigm was largely influenced by the writings of women scholars such as Ester Boserup (1970). The main concern for women scholars at this time was how women were included within processes of economic growth in the 'developing' world. It was apparent that economic growth impacted women differently to men by lowering their socioeconomic status. WID approaches sought to enhance women's roles and visibility in economic development, facilitating women's access to increased resources, opportunities, and benefits. WID largely ignored existing social structures that contributed to women's subordination and oppression, for example structures that confined women to domestic care and household work. In the years that followed, feminist critiques noted that it was not the absence of women in development, but a lack of systematic recognition of their contributions to development. What came to be known as the 'Woman and Development' (WAD) approach argued that viewing development through a formal economic lens rendered invisible the contributions that women made through care and reproductive economies. From a WAD perspective, there was a need to identify the role of capitalist production in establishing gender hierarchies to highlight the way these structures were reproducing women's invisibility and determining their inferior status in relation to men. The focus of WAD theories in development was to reconsider and revalue women's work in the care economy (Carnegie & Peterson-Singh, 2019).

By the 1990s a radical shift occurred within development which saw the transition from 'women' to 'gender'. This new paradigm dubbed 'Gender and Development' (GAD) was influenced by critiques from Chicana, black and postcolonial feminists who contested the essentialised views of women prevalent within previous WID and WAD approaches (Carnegie & Peterson-Singh, 2019; Icaza & Vazques, 2016). GAD perspectives contested WID's emphasis on the integration of women into the market as a way towards gender equality and WAD's emphasis on the valuing of women's contributions to the capitalist market as a solution to women's poverty and inequality.

GAD feminists brought attention to the dominant heterosexual social order that often remained unquestioned in earlier approaches. Any development objectives aimed at addressing women's oppression, were argued to be more effective if they were inclusive of men and aware of the ways men's identities are also shaped by gendered relations (Carnegie & Peterson-Singh, 2019). GAD approaches recognised that 'gender equality' requires 'transformative change' in gendered power relations from the household to global level. Whilst GAD approaches recognised that women did not exist in isolation but within webs of power and connection, this paradigm was still heavily reliant on a heteronormative gender binary for its frameworks and tools (Cornwall & Rivas, 2015). Discourses of 'gender equality' tend to presume a set of hierarchical and oppositional relationships between women and men, where women are structurally inferior, ignoring significant points of difference and configurations of power. Critical of GAD discourses, Ogundipe-Leslie (1994) and Sudarkasa (1986) highlight the significance of *other* gender relations in women's lives in Nigeria, for example relations of seniority, status, and consanguinity. In highlighting these differences, Ogundipe-Leslie criticises 'Western feminists' for their focus on an aspect of women's lives that may hold relatively little importance to their wellbeing, ignoring 'more significant' relations of power that structure women's lives.

It is within this context of evolving gender debates and changes in approaches that led to the emergence of many global initiatives for the advancement of women over the past 50 years and have been adopted by national governments and international institutional frameworks. In particular, the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing cemented the new GAD paradigm and was where two major concepts emerged. At this conference, governments from across the world signed the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA) which set a global framework to advance gender equality and end discrimination against women. Importantly, the BPfA ushered in a new approach to gender equality known as 'gender mainstreaming'. This quickly gained popularity as a strategy for governments to embed a gender perspective in all aspects of policy and programming. In the global south, gender mainstreaming saw the establishment of 'national machineries for the advancement of women', which became the central policy coordinating units globally. It was intended that gender would be 'mainstreamed' across all public policies as an issue pertinent to both women and men, so issues of gender would no longer be compartmentalised, or appear as a stand-alone issue (Carnegie & Singh-Peterson, 2019).

Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action

The BPfA covered twelve critical areas of concern which were recognised by the UN as crucial for governments, civil society, UN agencies and other stakeholders to focus on to eliminate discrimination against women and achieve gender equality. In the lead-up to the Beijing Conference, the Pacific Islands region adopted the first regional instrument to promote gender equality, the Pacific Platform for Action (PPA). The Platform, which formed the basis of the Pacific region's contribution at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, included 13 critical areas of concern related to health, education and training, economic empowerment, agriculture and fishing, legal and human rights, shared decision-making, environment, culture and the family, mechanisms to promote the advancement of women, violence, peace and justice, poverty, and indigenous people's rights. Whilst women's groups, often at the grass roots or community level, across the region had already been engaged in various gender work, the PPA was the first concerted effort to coordinate a regional gender strategy.

Kiribati was one of the 22 Pacific countries that contributed to the Pacific Platform of Action. Following the establishment of the PPA, each participating country established their own national action plan taking into consideration programs and projects that reflected the needs of women within their respective countries (Tekanene, 2004). In Kiribati, the National Plan of Action was a collaboration between the public sector and various women's groups and contained nine issues of concern, which were Health, Education, Violence Against Women, Economic Empowerment, Decision Making, Fisheries and Agriculture, Family and Cultural Values, Mechanisms to Promote Women's Advancement and Information Systems on Women's Situation.

From 1997 to 2001 the activities under the Kiribati PPA have been well documented (see appendix A for a full list of activities). Parallels can be drawn between the activities during this time and the activities of the Women's Interest program of the 1960s (see Chapter Four), particularly in their sole focus on women and skills confined to the home. Under the Kiribati PPA National Plan of Action there was a large focus on workshops designed to teach women important skills for small income generating activities and to improve nutrition and health within the home. The activities included sewing, gardening and cake making workshops. Whilst nutrition classes also taught

women how to incorporate healthier foods into household diets. Further echoing the Homemaker's Clubs of the 1960s were activities around good parenting and peace within the home, notably a 'virtue's workshop'. Despite the transformative gender approaches promised under the GAD paradigm and the BfPA, the activities under the National Plan of Action in Kiribati tended to focus solely on women, with little regard for the complex structures of power women's lives were embedded within. In maroro with Mere, who had previously worked as a gender mainstreaming trainer at this time, she notes that gender initiatives and ideas around gender equality were often met with confusion and tension;

> Well in those days when we talk about gender, immediately they think they are associated with Western ideas. Because they think when we promote gender, we, that we are promoting the power and rights of women. (Mere, personal communication, January 2022)

This focus on women has been a criticism of GAD approaches in the years preceding the BPfA. Despite GAD's call for the recognition of gender relations and how these structure women and men's lives, the scaling up 'gender mainstreaming' approaches resulted in a 'diluted effect' where gender was introduced into policy through an 'add women and stir' approach with gender becoming synonymous for 'women' (Icaza & Vázquez, 2016; Baden & Goetz, 1997). Important to note however, the PPA has since been reviewed and revised at roughly ten-year intervals. The revisions of the PPA incorporate the shifts of various conceptualisations of gender discussed in the earlier section of this chapter. However, Kiribati PPA reviews cannot be found for preceding years indicating that beyond the period of 1997 to 2001, the PPA has had limited significance for gender initiatives in Kiribati.

Ratification of CEDAW

The ratification of Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against women (CEDAW) marked a significant step towards the recognition of women's rights and gender equality in Kiribati. The BPfA called on all governments to develop plans of action to make steps to ratify and implement the CEDAW. Although the establishment of CEDAW preceded the BPfA, the GoK did not ratify the convention until 2004. Ratification by the GoK was applauded as a landmark decision for I-Kiribati women and for Kiribati as a young nation. Ratification of CEDAW in Kiribati saw a much clearer focus on gender issues by the GoK, development partners, NGOs, and

advocacy groups. Whilst the BfPA played a major role in paving the way for the ratification of CEDAW, I-Kiribati women were active in lobbying the GoK to sign CEDAW in previous decades (SPC, 2000).

The decision to ratify drew strong negative reactions from sectors of the public and in part contributed to slow progress by the Government. Although the initial State report for Kiribati was due in 2005, the GoK submitted a combined Initial, First, Second and Third Periodic CEDAW Report in 2019 and in 2020, Kiribati appeared at its first dialogue with the Committee to present its progress. Since ratification, the GoK has supported a range of initiatives aimed at addressing gender equality. Of key significance was the 'Family Health and Support Study' conducted in 2008. The findings of this report made visible, for the first time, the pervasiveness and full extent of gender-based violence in Kiribati. The study demonstrated that 68% of women in Kiribati experience violence at the hands of a partner, the highest in the region. Interestingly, since the publication of the report some I-Kiribati women have discussed an unhappiness and unease with the way in which their personal issues were publicised. In a study that Rose (2014) conducted with women in Kiribati, around women's organizations, some I-Kiribati women were hesitant to be interviewed. This was due to 'bad' experiences they had had with consultants who had spent a brief period interviewing women and then would release reports where the women felt their words had been taken out of context. Rose (2014) notes that her time in Kiribati marked the release of the findings from the 2008 study and the women she spoke with were upset by the findings. Although they felt the findings were important, they were concerned with Kiribati being viewed as a 'bad' place by the rest of the world.

The publication of the findings triggered the GoK to act towards addressing gender inequality (Tabe, 2016), resulting in an influx in activities aimed at addressing the elimination of violence against women. This resulted in several key government policies and action plans - the Elimination of Sexual Elimination of Sexual and Gender Based Violence Policy and Action Plan 2011-21, Te Rau n Te Mwenga Act – Family Peace Act 2014 and the Gender Equality and Women's Development Policy 2018 - and the establishment of the Ministry of Women, Youth, Sports, and Social Affairs (MWYSSA) in 2014. Despite the immense steps forward for the GoK in terms of addressing gender inequities, there have and continue to be significant challenges in meeting its CEDAW obligations.

When making its first appearance in front of the CEDAW committee, the GoK delegation attributed its slow progress in meetings its CEDAW obligations to geographical isolation, overpopulation and a lack of resources and capacity. The rise of the sea level, climate change and king tides also were identified as key challenges issues (CEDAW, 2020). Whilst somewhat predictable, this sits at odds with the discourse of "large ocean states" used by Pacific leaders, including Anote Tong, former president of Kiribati in UN General Assembly debates (Chan, 2018), as a counterpoint to discourses that frame certain Pacific nations as resource poor, vulnerable and insignificant. These kinds of discourses appear to be missing when it comes to actioning progress towards gender equality.

Of interest to the current research were claims made by the GoK in its combined CEDAW periodic report, that custom and culture are also barriers for Kiribati in meeting its CEDAW obligations. UN conventions and treaties such as CEDAW are embedded within universal discourses of human rights and the implementation of these in non-Western contexts has sparked much debate and contention. In the era of decolonization, many newly independent countries saw Human Rights institutions as another form of Western imposed values and belief systems (Mutua, 2002). These views have also been expressed in parts of Pacific with critics arguing that Western framings of Human Rights can be foreign to indigenous Pacific worldviews and perspectives. The emphasis on rights and the individual in key Human Rights documents and institutions is argued as running counter to traditional Pacific values of *duties* and *obligations*, and an emphasis on the *collective* or *group* (Narokobi, 1989; Angelo, 1992; Thaman, 2000; Care, 2006). These culturally relativist views were also identified as one the key challenges in lobbying the Kiribati government to ratify CEDAW (SPC, 2000). Article 5 of CEDAW often cited as being the most controversial by the GoK, both in the lead up to ratifying and subsequently through its periodic reports. Article 5 requires signatories to amend customary practices that are based on the idea of the inferiority or the superiority of either of the sexes or on stereotyped roles for men and women (United Nations CEDAW, 1979). In the Kiribati context this was argued as being particularly hard to meet due to the existence of certain customs identified as the expectation for wives to defer to their husbands and female members of the family to defer to the male members of the family, the exclusion of women from decision making in traditional settings, the traditional norms governing ownership of

property and land; and the formerly accepted notion that it is appropriate for a husband to discipline his wife by physical beating (GoK, 2019). In response to the CEDAW committee's questions around what the Government was doing to address these customs, the Kiribati delegation noted it was raising awareness on gender equality and women's rights for example through a 'Kiribati Male Behavioural Change programme' (GoK, 2019).

The CEDAW shadow report as well as concluding observations by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against women revealed another major issue for addressing gender issues in Kiribati. The CEDAW shadow report for Kiribati was a joint report led by the Kiribati Women and Children Support Centre and supported by Aia Maea Ainen Kiribati (AMAK), the umbrella organisation for women's groups, Tobwaraoi Community and Kiribati Women in Maritime Association (KWIMA). A key area of concern was a lack of support to Women's NGOs in Kiribati. The report notes that government funding and budget allocation tends to prioritise funding to specific groups, and funding to support women's organisations is not a priority. Despite women's groups being instrumental in assisting the Government in fulfilling its obligations under CEDAW and have even been listed/included within Government action plans (see for example the GEWD policy), their effectiveness has been severely limited by a persistent lack of Government funding (Tokam & Barako, 2020). A lack of funding was also listed as a key concern by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women in its concluding observations on the combined initial, second and third periodic reports of Kiribati (Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, 2020).

An eventual, albeit slow responsiveness of the GoK to meet its CEDAW obligations as well as a lack of funding to women's NGO's sit within a broader socio-political context, and a colonial history. A 'lack of resources or 'capacity' to deal with gender issues sits in contrast with views espoused by Kiribati's former and current leaders around "large ocean states" or the "Blue Pacific". Resisting discourses that position Kiribati as resource-poor, small, or vulnerable do not seem to find their way into discussions around actioning gender equality. Revealing perhaps a reticence by the GoK to invest in actions towards achieving gender equality. Furthermore, the use of 'culture' as a means to delay action on gender equality is reminiscent of the way in which custom has been utilised to continue harmful practices towards women in other parts of the Pacific.

Narratives that have been fiercely rejected by Pacific women such as ni-Vanuatu politician Grace Mera Molisa (1983). These critiques highlight those colonial processes institutionalised understandings that a women's role ought to remain in the domestic sphere. As discussed in the Chapter Four, processes of colonization also worked to confine the role of I-Kiribati women to the home, 'cultural' narratives such as those espoused by the GoK are thus also bound up within the colonial matrices of power (Lugones, 2007; Mignolo, 2007).

Pacific Leaders' Gender Equality Declaration (PLGED)

The Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration (PLGED) marked a significant moment for regional action on gender equality. Although the impact of this declaration in generating momentum on gender equality action remains uncertain, the PLGED played an important role for the establishment of the Pacific Women programme. The PLGED was adopted at the annual PIF meeting hosted by the Government of the Cook Islands in 2012. Through the PLGED, leaders recognised that gender equality will contribute significantly to 'a prosperous, stable and secure Pacific for all current and future generations' and expressed their 'determination and invigorated commitment to efforts to lift the status of women in the Pacific and empower them to be active participants in economic, political, and social life' (Pacific Islands Forum, 2012, p. 1). In a review of forum communiques Kershaw and Naidu (2017) have demonstrated that over the course of the forum's history since 1971, the forum has slowly made gender equality a regional priority with momentum only gaining traction in recent years. Thus, the PLGED represents the most comprehensive statement to date of Forum Leaders' commitment to enhancing the status of women in the Pacific across the economic, political, and social sectors. Through the PLGED leaders have committed to implementing specific national policy actions in gender responsive government programmes and policies; decision making; economic empowerment; ending violence against women; and health and education. Similar to the PPA 2018-2030, PLGED is seen as being a driver to accelerate progress of the SDGs, particularly goal 5, as well as implementing gender equality across all goals.

Most countries have established national women's machineries, in the form of government ministries or departments, like MWYSSA in Kiribati, to progress change across the PLGED

priority areas. National development plans are also required to include gender equality provisions and allocate resources to develop national action plans for tackling the PLGED's six priority areas. Which is Gender-responsive government programs and policies, Decision-making, Economic Empowerment, Ending violence against women, Health, and Education. Through the declaration, leaders called upon development partners to work in a coordinated, consultative, and harmonised way to support national efforts to address gender equality across the region, and to increase their financial/technical support for gender equality and women's empowerment programmes. The PLGED also documents leaders' agreement that progress on economic, political, and social position of women should be reported at each Forum Leaders' meeting. However, reporting against the PLGED has been slow and ad hoc. At the 2016 Forum Leaders meeting in Pohnpei, leaders agreed that future reporting on the PLGED would be incorporated into quadrennial regional reporting processes against the SDGs: and a report on a particular priority area of the PLGED biennially (PIF Secretariat, 2016). However, progress reports for the PLGED from 2016 onwards could not be found for the current research.

Of particular significance to the signing of the PLGED, was attendance of significant international leaders at the forum meeting in 2012. Then Australian Prime Minister Julia Gillard, the first female prime minister in Australia, attended the meeting with a clear gender equality agenda for the forum, telling reporter's when she landed "As the only women attending the forum, the only female leader, I will be focusing on gender equality" (Flitton, 2012). Gillard announced a comprehensive 10-year, $320 million program for women's advancement which, as the next chapter will discuss, formed the basis of the Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development programme. US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton also made an unprecedented appearance at the Post-Forum Dialogue, the highest-level U.S participation in the forum's history (Morrison, 2012). During her remarks at the Post-Forum Dialogue, Clinton made clear to forum leaders the U. S's priority on gender equality and women in the Pacific region. Clinton also announced the Rarotonga Partnership for the Advancement of Pacific Island Women – a collaborative venture with the Australian and New Zealand Governments to promote the training and participation of island women in Pacific universities and regional organizations (Clinton, 2012).

Tensions, Challenges and Coloniality

Despite the progress made in terms of regional and national commitments to gender equality, realising actual progress has been slow. The status of and progress towards gender equality is often formally determined by measuring outcomes against various global indicators such as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the current Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Carnegie & Singh-Peterson, 2019). SDG indicators to measure progress against goal 5 (gender equality) signal that progress towards gender equality has been slow. The percentage of women representatives in national parliaments is extremely low in the Pacific, the percentage for all South Pacific nations is 8.8% (as of March 2022), Kiribati is just below the average at 8.6% (Pacific Women in Politics, 2022). Furthermore, latest data shows that 25% of ever-partnered women and girls in Kiribati are victims of violence by a current or former intimate partner in the last 12 months. Kiribati comes in behind the Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, and PNG with 28.1%, 29.4% and 30.6% respectively (Pacific Data Hub, 2021).

Powerful narratives around the role of custom in the region are often employed to explain the slow progress made towards gender equality, as seen by the GoK in relation to CEDAW Article 5 (GoK, 2019) whilst lines of questioning by the CEDAW committee also referred to the existence of traditional patriarchal customs and practices in Kiribati that prevent progress on gender equality (Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, 2020). Yet, what of the role colonization has played in establishing structures and environments that have been discriminatory to Pacific women? On the one hand rhetoric espoused by the GoK can be critiqued for its patriarchal views that fail to place an importance on women and gender equality, whilst views towards Kiribati culture espoused by outsiders such as the CEDAW committee can also be criticised for failing to understand the nuances of Kiribati social life. However, both views fail to adequately address the ways in which culture is heavily bound up within the colonial matrices of power, and therefore are limited in how we can begin addressing issues of gender equality without reinforcing colonial and patriarchal relationships of power.

Rendering invisible the coloniality of gender

Subedi and co-authors (2021) argue that any discussion of gender equality or human rights needs to be situated within the historical context of modern state formation. Compared to other regions globally, decolonization of Pacific Island countries started much later in the 1960s and continued until the 1990s, with Kiribati gaining independence in 1979. Absent from most international and regional gender frameworks is an acknowledgement of inherited colonial legacies in Pacific countries that continue to contribute to social inequities. During the process of self-determination, Kiribati inherited types of governance systems and laws from its colonial past. As illustrated in Chapter Four in leading up to self-determination, I-Kiribati women were confined to the domestic sphere which limited the ability for I-Kiribati women to participate in governance within the new independent state. Furthermore, laws were passed that have excluded the inheritance of land for women, despite women being able to receive land in traditional Kiribati custom (Burnett, 2002; Sinclair, 2020). The criminalisation of homosexuality also entrenched colonial ideas of gender and has contributed to ongoing discrimination against binabinaine and binabinamwane (BIMBA, 2015).

Another crucial factor, although is often overlooked by international gender equality frameworks, is that Kiribati like other Pacific countries, continues to suffer from a colonial history of human rights violation. From the mid-1940s until 1996 the Pacific Islands were used to develop and test nuclear weapons on land (Firth, 1987; Griffen et al., 2020) with the UK conducting tests on Kiritimati in Kiribati. Furthermore, the extraction of resources by former colonisers has also resulted in devastating losses of livelihoods and revenues of income for newly independent countries. In Kiribati this was seen with the mining of Banaba Island for phosphate. Whilst Kiribati has managed to retain some a small proportion of the revenue from the mining of phosphate, the entire population of Banaba had to be relocated to Rabi in Fiji. Today, the handful of families that remain live in constant food and water insecurity (RNZ, 2021; Teaiwa, 2014). Universal discourses of gender equality can be blind to these historical and intersectional considerations and contribute to the invisibility of the 'coloniality of power'. Objectives for gender equality and gender equity cannot be disentangled from these broader social structures that continue to shape experiences of discrimination and social inequality in Kiribati.

Reinforcing the coloniality of gender

As established earlier the understandings of gender equality used by most multilateral agencies and donor governments are based on heteronormative binary understandings of ‘men’ and ‘women’. Therefore, frameworks such as CEDAW, the BPfA, and even the PLGED reinforce a binary understanding of gender as being about ‘men’ and/or ‘women’ (or in some cases solely women) (Hagen, 2016). Within the discourses of gender equality expressed in these institutions there is an uncomfortable silence around the place of those who exist on the margins of these categories. Within these gender frameworks there is little discussion around gender equality for the LGBTQIA+ community. It cannot be gender equality if not all genders are included. One could argue this is an example of the ‘coloniality of gender’ at play. An emphasis on equality based on binary understandings doesn’t allow for an understanding of equality rooted within communal selves or coalitional resistances as espoused by Lugones (2010).

Whilst universal frameworks are important for identifying and bringing to light the very lived inequities within the current oppressive system, they obscure the modern/colonial gender system which makes it difficult to decolonise thinking around how indigenous Pacific peoples conceptualise themselves. In doing so, it reinforces the coloniality of gender by continuing to ignore and render invisible alternative ways of knowing and thinking about gender and equality. In their analysis of international and national indicators of gender equality in the Pacific, Mckinnon et al (2016) argue that existing measures produce “the non-existence of both diverse ecologies of productivity and gender recognition in the Pacific” (p. 1388). The performative effect of these indicators forecloses the possibility that there might be different ways of pursuing development, and the existence of expanded conceptions of human rights that are inclusive and respectful of place-based gender differences. Mainstream development discourses in the Pacific, including those in Kiribati discussed earlier in this chapter, tend to view empowerment as only occurring through “the rational, competitive, market-oriented, maximising individual” (Mckinnon et al, 2016, p. 1380). Gender equality initiatives that do not allow for or consider alternative development subjectivities, those based perhaps on values of relationality, kinship, and

community, are complicit with the ‘coloniality of gender by marginalising collective and communal selves.

Crowding out grassroots women’s organisations

Support for civil society in Kiribati is another key challenge for advancing gender equality. As mentioned earlier, a key issue within the CEDAW shadow report for Kiribati which was led by a coalition of various women’s groups, is limited core funding for women’s groups. Addressing gender issues requires significant social change across different levels of society and not just from the government level. Yet, in the context of Kiribati support for groups that focus on women or LGBTQIA+ communities, such as BIMBA, rarely have the long-term funding security that enable them to sustain large-scale and long-term change. The Government, through the Ministry of Women, Youth, Sports, and Social Affairs is the recipient for most of the gender equality funding (as evidenced by the Pacific Women Country Plan). The nature of civil society in Kiribati is such that women’s groups and other NGOs must compete with government ministries for funding from bilateral and multilateral donors, an area of concern mentioned by Kiribati women. This was evident in a six-year evaluation report for the Pacific Women programme, where Kiribati women expressed some concern about the crowded funding space that is creating tensions and competition amongst local organisations and groups as they seek to position their organisations in the competition for more and continued funding. (Tabualevu et al., 2020, p. 40). As such, this competitive environment limits grassroots, locally driven development, and social change, whereby gender equality ideas could be positioned more effectively to bring about sustainable, transformative change.

Chapter Six: How does *Pacific Women* deal with contradictory gender narratives?

Introduction

The previous chapter outlined the various gender initiatives and accompanying discourses that have been brought to Kiribati over the last thirty years. Over the last thirty years new understandings, ideas and theories of gender have been introduced into Kiribati. At times these understandings have created spaces that advance progress towards gender equality and at others, have created tensions which reproduce colonial hierarchies. The ideas and concepts underpinning regional and national gender policies and frameworks are largely informed by Western liberal ideologies and knowledge systems. Within these policies and frameworks there is little room for questioning or exploring indigenous Kiribati conceptions of te maiu raoi (the good life) or what gender equality means in Kiribati contexts, past and present. Large tensions and questions remain, such as the value of 'safe houses' for women subject to domestic violence. There is a large silence within these international and regional gender frameworks around the role that colonization has played in contributing to contemporary gender inequities. Furthermore, these imported frameworks do little to disrupt the heteronormative and patriarchal understandings of gender and gender roles laid down by colonial processes of education and missionisation. The place of indigenous gender and sexual diverse identities remains uncertain, whilst indigenous conceptions of gender based on collective and communal subjectivities remain hidden. Despite these tensions, attention to gender equality in the Pacific remains a key national and regional agenda. Following the Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration (PLGED), Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) introduced AUD320 million for Pacific gender equality initiatives for a ten-year period, forming the basis of the Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development (Pacific Women) program. This chapter will explore how Pacific Women deals with the tensions and contradictions around understandings of gender and culture in Kiribati.

Context of Pacific Women[7]

It was at the 2012 Pacific Islands Forum meeting held in the Cook Islands, that Australia's then Prime Minister Julia Gillard announced AUD$320 million for Pacific gender equality initiatives. This funding formed the basis of a ten-year program, Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development (Pacific Women). Pacific Women reflected the Government of Australia's policy commitment to work for improved equality and empowerment of women and reflected desires of Pacific government to receive assistance in meeting the commitments made in the PLGED (Itad, 2017). Pacific Women supported fourteen Pacific countries to meet the commitments made in the 2012 PLGED to ensure that women in these countries 'are able to participate fully, freely, and safely in political, economic and social life' (Pacific Women, 2015).

Pacific Women was managed by the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs in Canberra with offices in the Pacific. In 2013 the delivery strategy was developed into a program design informed by regional workshops held in Fiji and Papua New Guinea (PNG). These forums and other consultations with regional organisations based in Fiji revealed that actions to address women's inequality across the Pacific were not adequately responding to the need. Work was often siloed in small projects with limited opportunity to scale-up, and with poor sharing of information and learning.

Alongside the design process, individual Pacific Women country plans were developed in consultation with women, men and communities, partner governments and other key stakeholders across the 14 Pacific Island Forum countries. The main message from the country planning processes was that the local context of women's experiences needed to be understood. Pacific women, thus claims to be based on meeting the individual needs of countries, and the women, men, children, and communities in those countries.

[7] Pacific Women has now become Pacific Women Lead (PWL), which builds on the strength of Pacific Women programme. PWL is still funded by DFAT but now has transitioned to the Pacific Community (SPC)'s Human Rights and Social Development Division who be responsible in managing the programme (SPC, 2022).

An Advisory Board of prominent Pacific women and men guided the Pacific Women program and Australia's Ambassador for Women and Girls is an observer to the Board. The Board's membership was representative of the different geographic regions in the Pacific and Board members come from a wide range of organisations which work to address gender inequalities. To support program management and implementation, a Pacific Women Support Unit was established in Fiji, with a sub-office in PNG. The Support Unit provides technical, administrative, and logistical support to DFAT and to Pacific Women's implementing partners. Within the Pacific Women programme there was a big emphasis on delivering activities in partnership with others. As such the program has worked closely with a range of partners in the region, including governments, Pacific and international nongovernmental organisations, regional organisations, United Nations agencies, research organisations, development banks and the private sector.

The four main outcomes sought by the Pacific Women program include the following:

- Women, and women's interests, are increasingly and effectively represented and visible through leadership at all levels of decision-making.
- Women have expanded economic opportunities to earn income and accumulate economic assets.
- Violence against women is reduced and survivors of violence have access to support services and to justice.
- Women in the Pacific will have a stronger sense of their own agency, supported by a changing legal and social environment and through increased access to the services they need. (Pacific Women, 2020, p. 1)

Initiatives and country programs are designed around meeting these four outcomes. Although, the Pacific Women program officially concluded at the end of 2021, the program has now transitioned to Pacific Women lead and is now being implemented and managed by the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC).

Pacific Women and Kiribati

The Kiribati country program is one of the smaller Pacific Women country programs. The Australian Government, through Pacific Women committed approximately AUD$9.9 million over a 10-year period (2012-2022) on initiatives supporting women's empowerment in Kiribati. In-country programmes are designed through what are called 'Country Plans' and are the mechanism through which Pacific Women outcomes and activities are planned and agreed between DFAT and counterpart Pacific governments, following extensive national consultation.

According to the Kiribati Country Plan document (Pacific Women, 2020), the Kiribati Pacific Women program was developed following a document review and in-country design mission in April of 2013. Consultations were held with stakeholders on Tarawa, representing government ministries, civil society, the private sector, and regional organizations. The joint Australian Government and GoK-UN Women Preparatory Assistance Project was closely involved in the process.

The GoK was highly involved in the implementation of the program. Most of the support offered to Kiribati, through Pacific Women, is given to the Ministry of Women, Youth Sports, and Social Affairs (MWYSSA). The rationale being to promote Kiribati-driven responses to the inequalities faced by women in Kiribati. However, questions around ownership of the program arise given that there is a persistent lack of funding from the GoK towards non-governmental women's organisations, as evidenced by issues raised in the latest Kiribati CEDAW shadow report discussed in Chapter Four.

The current research analysed Pacific Women documents and Kiribati Country Program initiatives to determine how Pacific Women dealt with the contradictory understandings of gender and culture in Kiribati. The remainder of this chapter will analyse the various activities and documents under each program outcome, in relation to the understandings of culture and gender they work with and (re)produce.

Pacific Women Outcomes and the Kiribati Country Programme

Outcome: Violence against women is reduced and survivors of violence have access to support services and to justice.

Most Pacific Women funding in Kiribati goes to addressing violence against women (VAW). As mentioned previously in this thesis, I-Kiribati women face some of the highest levels of violence in the region. In 2010, the now widely cited Kiribati Family Health and Support Study (SPC, 2010) found that 68% of women aged 15-49 years has experienced sexual or physical violence from their partner. This is in comparison to 33% in Tonga (Jansen et al., 2009) and the global average of 30% (WHO, 2021). Within the Pacific Women Kiribati country plan document (2020), Pacific Women supports several initiatives that have been established by international NGOs and are implemented by the Ministry of Women, Youth, Sports, and Social Affairs (MYWSSA), Pacific Women's key development partner in Kiribati.

The Ministry is responsible for implementing several initiatives aimed at addressing VAW in Kiribati, including the Strengthening Peaceful Villages (SPV) programme and the Respectful Relationships programme. SPV is part of a larger UN Women programme and takes a 'multi-level, multi-stakeholder' approach to address the imbalance of power between women and men within communities, and to reshape inequitable social norms around gender, power, and violence (Miedema et al., 2019). The Respectful Relationships initiative incorporates a respectful relationships program into the school curriculum. In the Pacific Women six-year evaluation report, respondents mentioned there was a perception amongst both Kiribati men and women that initiatives such as the Respectful Relationships curriculum and the SPV project are 'changing their culture' (Tabualevu et al., 2020, p. 37). This sits in contrast to insights from maroro, where all participants indicated that any initiatives addressing gender equality must be rooted in Kiribati values and that respect and gender equality can be found within Kiribati culture. For example, Mere notes that.

> …if you really think about it, gender equality shouldn't be a new idea. Because in the olden days, respect, you respect your wife. Gender is there already. The culture doesn't say you have the power, so you beat your wife if she doesn't listen to you. There is nothing in our culture that says that. (Mere, personal communication, 2022)

Mere indicates that at some point there has been a change or misuse of culture to justify or normalise violence against women and unequal gender relations.

> …to me I always think that there should be a training somewhere in Kiribati that will try to revive our culture, because I think a lot of our people now are abusing it. They are not using it as it is supposed to be. But if one studies it and talks to unimwane (elderly men), and even in my thesis, I just realised how beautiful the culture is. (Mere, 2022)

Mere sees upholding Kiribati cultural values as integral to addressing violence against women, which is interesting considering the views of those in Kiribati towards the SPV and Respectful Relationships programmes. Whilst the Pacific Women six-year evaluation report (Tabualevu et al., 2020) does not further elaborate on these perceptions, it hints at the possibility that there is a lack of ownership regarding definitions and understanding of gender equality at the local level in Kiribati. Mere is not alone in her views towards a culturally empowering and appropriate approach to addressing violence against women. Mannell and co-author's (2021) argue that indigenous knowledge and ways of thinking have often been undermined historically by Western research practices and so too within VAWG prevention interventions. In contrast, they argue for the meaningful integration of epistemologies from the global south into VAWG research practices and the inclusion of communities to be involved in the design process of research and interventions, which has been evident elsewhere in the Pacific such as Tonga and Fiji.

Within Pacific Women documents related to the Kiribati country program, statistics of VAW in Kiribati are often cited. Whilst statistics and research around the prevalence of violence in Kiribati have been incredibly valuable, the complex and intersecting factors and drivers of violence are rarely explored. Where there is attention paid to causes of and factors contributing to VAW in Kiribati, it is often attributed to harmful cultural practices and norms. For example, challenges to Pacific Women progress include an understanding that 'cultural identity is tied up with a sense of tradition that embodies quite rigid gender dynamics' (Itad, 2017, p. 19). Within the context of Kiribati this is argued to be evident within customary leadership structures. The maneaba system for example is often cited as evidence of Kiribati's patriarchal and rigid gender dynamics, whereby women's views in this leadership system can only be raised via representation of a man.

However, increasingly community maneaba's are used for community consultations where both women and men have a role in speaking. In one of the maroro of the current research, Riita shared an anecdote when she had to present the findings of a GBV study in Kiribati at a local village maneaba. Whilst some in attendance argued that domestic violence was part of the culture, the maneaba served as a space where other men shared opposing views (Riita, personal communication, January, 2022). The consultation in the maneaba resulted in a productive discussion around addressing gender-based violence which was facilitated by being done in culturally appropriate way.

Without spaces both in the literature and within initiatives to discuss the complex nature of violence in Kiribati or to discuss what indigenous Kiribati perceptions of equitable gender relations looks like, there is risk of further perpetuating asymmetrical relations of power whereby Kiribati culture is framed as incompatible with advanced ideas of gender equality and women's empowerment. Kiribati women have strongly embraced the traditional maneaba system and it is seen as an integral aspect of Kiribati identity and culture. Some have argued that the maneaba has historically been a place of refuge for women running away from violence (Naamori-Sinclair, 2020) and where unimane (male elders) can make decisions to making peace and resolve conflict. These perceptions have led Kiribati communities in Aotearoa New Zealand to establish a family violence prevention strategic action based on a maneaba model (Naamori-Sinclair, 2015).

Outcome: Women have expanded economic opportunities to earn income and accumulate economic assets.

Economic discourses are prevalent within mainstream development practice. This, combined with the dominance of gender mainstreaming in development, means it is not surprising that Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE) is also a key objective within the Pacific Women program. Throughout the Pacific region WEE approaches are recognised and supported by governments, civil society, and donors. WEE approaches are embedded in national gender mainstreaming policies and wider regional frameworks, including the PLGED. Underpinning mainstream WEE approaches is the notion that women's economic empowerment and agency will lead to overall economic development (Cornwall, 2016).

In the first progress report for Pacific Women (2015) these understandings are also evident as women's economic empowerment and agency are also linked to improved macroeconomic outcomes. By eliminating barriers for women's full access to and participation in the formal labour force the report notes "productivity could be increased by as much as 25% in some countries through better allocation of skills and talent. Women's higher income and increased control over money leads to increased household spending on food and schooling, health, and nutrition, which in turn leads to greater sustained poverty reduction." (Pacific Women, 2015, p. 24). Furthermore, Australia's former Ambassador for Women and Girls, Ms Natasha Stott Despoja, is quoted within the report stating, "To achieve economic expansion, we need to unlock a vital source of growth that will fuel our economies in the coming decades. And we all know that source is women" (as quoted in Pacific Women, 2015, p. 24).

The tendency of WEE to frame women from the global south as "a vital source of growth" is reflective of what Carrasco-Miro (2020) has called a colonial form of development. Imagining women from the global south only as 'capitalist' income-generating subjects, aspiring to modernity via the world of paid labour is problematic. In her critique of WEE approaches Carrasco-Miro (2020) reveals the 'cultural-rootedness' of the theories and understandings that underpin WEE. In highlighting the ways that WEE approaches are rooted types of knowledge systems and contexts provides ways to challenge the authority of these capitalist assumptions, highlighting that WEE approaches can be biased towards first world experiences. Capitalist economic practices are not the only way to do 'development'. Mentioned previously in this thesis, concepts of relationality and interconnectedness in many Pacific cultures can be at odds with mainstream development's tendencies to promote an economy based on individual choices, shared material resources, self-sufficient knowledge, or social welfare. Rather, Pacific indigenous economies can be understood as incorporating an interconnected worldview involving time and space, history, and existence, and governed by cultures of collectivity, sustainability and reciprocity as mentioned previously (for example see Gegeo, 1998; Maiava & King, 2007; Hughes & Scheyvens, 2018).

In the Kiribati context, limited Pacific Women funding has gone to WEE. In the ten years of the Kiribati country program, Pacific Women has funded one activity under this objective, the

Women's Economic Empowerment Feasibility Study (Caulfield, 2018). The aim of the study was to identify a range of viable economic opportunities within the realities of the Kiribati context. The definition in this report of WEE is defined as "women have the ability to succeed and advance economically and the power to make and act on economic decisions" (Caulfied, 2018, pg. 2). Interestingly, the study findings suggest that many Kiribati women made independent decisions about how their income was spent and that men were very supportive of women earning an income. Although some interviewed men indicated they did not want women earning money from certain activities. The findings from the report also aligns with findings from maroro held with Mere.

> Where men make decisions and don't consult the wife, then that man is not I-Kiribati. I haven't seen where Kiribati men decide on their own. They always involve the wives, and they always ask the wife. (Mere, personal communication, January 2022).

Whilst the feasibility study revealed interesting aspects of gender dynamics within Kiribati households, the study itself does little to explore alternative economic practices in the Kiribati context. Rather, the study focuses on potential income generation activities for individual women. Whilst these neoliberal understandings are evident in the feasibility study and earlier Pacific Women documents, in a series developed to discuss lessons learnt over the ten years of the program, the Pacific Practice Series (Gurney, 2021) recognises that there is limited relevance and applicability of strategies and approaches to WEE that originate outside the region. The Pacific Practice series recommends using Pacific-centred, women-led approaches when it comes to implementing WEE programs. Going forward it is unclear what this might look like in the Kiribati context.

Outcome: Women, and women's interests, are increasingly and effectively represented and visible through leadership at all levels of decision making.

Women's political participation in the Pacific region is significantly lower, around 8.2%, compared to the global average of around 24.3% (Pacific Data Hub, 2021). Progress has been slow but there are signs of change, for example temporary special measures such as quotas have been used successfully in the region to increase women's representation at the sub-national level, including Kiribati. In Kiribati, although no Pacific Women funding has gone to national activities

under this objective. Pacific Women runs a regional program called the Pacific Women Parliamentary Partnerships (Australian International and Community Relations Office, Department of the House of Representative*)* has activities in Kiribati (Pacific Women, 2020). The Parliamentary Partnerships program supports Pacific women parliamentarians and their staff to ensure gender equality issues are addressed in parliament.

Similar to the tendency for WEE approaches to subjectify women in the global south, the Pacific Women rationale for increased women in leadership also appears to be linked to economic growth. For example, "supporting women's leadership in the Pacific is seen as key to reducing poverty, promoting economic growth and democracy, and increasing the wellbeing of women, girls, and their families" (Pacific Women, 2020a, p. 1). Interestingly, whilst women are framed as capitalist subjects the same documents tend to frame 'kastom' or culture as impediments to progress. Whilst Pacific Women documents highlight complex barriers to women in decision making, it is the framing of culture, particularly in the Kiribati context that warrants a critical lens. In Kiribati, customary leadership structures are cited as evidence of discriminatory gender practices and in limiting progress to Pacific Women outcomes. For example, "Women are in general not expected to disagree with men; customary leadership structures often embed social stratification and explicitly exclude women – such as the maneaba system in Kiribati in which women's views can only be raised via representation of a man" (Itad, 2017, p. 19). However, insights from maroro with Kiribati gender experts and writings of I-Kiribati scholars complicate these assertions.

The maneaba is central to I-Kiribati customary life and continues to play a major role in political, social, and cultural contexts. Others have offered what could be seen as a more implicit feminist view of the maneaba system (Namoori-Sinclair, 2020; World Bank, 2021; Melbourne Museum, 2021). Whilst women do not hold a traditional or conventional decision-making role in the maneaba, they still have significant influence in the decision-making process. There is a Kiribati saying that says that when someone is in power, the wife is the one who makes decisions (Namoori-Sinclair, 2020). Women will often share their input with the men who represent the family and take their seat at the inner circle of the maneaba. Furthermore, whilst it is unimwane, elder men, who do the formal decision-making, the maneaba itself and its inner functioning's are made up of the collective effort of the entire community.

Women play an essential role in the running of a maneaba, a role which is not to be discarded or devalued through a western feminist lens. World Bank Liaison Officer, Akka Rimon, notes that the preparing and serving of food in the maneaba are important parts of meetings and ceremonies (as cited in World Bank, 2021). Furthermore, the building of a maneaba also involves the work of women who create the rafters for the roof, the string that ties the building together, as well as the mats which people sit on. In a Pacific community story series at Melbourne Museum, I-Kiribati writer Marita Davies notes, "The thing that I really like about the construction of the maneaba… is that even though it's the men's role to build the structure, I really love the fact that it can't be built without the women making the rope with the coconut husk. I use that as my own identity, thinking well, they can't get anything done without the women … (laughter) literally holding together the community, that's how I interpret it." (Davies et al., 2021). Thus, whilst the maneaba may represent a hierarchical system of leadership within global development discourse, for I-Kiribati men and women it symbolises a place of sanctuary, community, and cultural identity and as a place where everyone, regardless of gender has a place and a role.

Outcome: Women in the Pacific will have a stronger sense of their own agency, supported by a changing legal and social environment and through increased access to the services they need.

In Kiribati, action towards this outcome was in supporting the restoration of Kiribati women's umbrella organisation – Aia Mwaea Ainen Kiribati (AMAK). AMAK has had a long history in supporting and advancing women's interests in Kiribati, dating back to pre-independence. Established in 1977, the GoK established AMAK as a federation of Women's Associations, that incorporated faith-based groups as well the groups formed out of the Homemaker's Clubs of the 1960s. The establishment of AMAK was to provide a coordinating body for women's groups across Kiribati that could advocate on behalf of women's interests at the national level (Rose, 2014). In the preceding decades, AMAK has been a quasi-governmental organization, shifting under the arms of various government ministries.

In recent years however, AMAK as an organisation underwent significant challenges transitioning from a government agency to an independent NGO in 2010. The transition was contested by some members, and many felt as though very little support was given to AMAK to transition to an NGO. Due to difficulties in securing core funding, the once active national women's group was inactive

for several years (Brown & Chetty, 2017). In recent years, development partners have supported the revitalisation of AMAK. Pacific Women provided technical assistance through a report which assessed the current status of the organisation, and which provided recommendations on possible way's forward. In this report it was recommended that more coordination and negotiation needed to occur between AMAK and MWYSSA, amid concerns of confusion and duplication of roles (Brown & Chetty, 2017). Despite Pacific Women's support, AMAK as an organisation continues to struggle to secure funding evident through the CEDAW shadow report, which AMAK and other women's organisations led in writing.

According to Pacific Women documents an important part of Pacific Women's work in enhancing women's agency is strengthening civil society groups that have feminist, activist and/or disability mandates as "local partners are identified as being best positioned to effectively provide analysis of the socio-cultural factors that drive specific forms of violence in local contexts. In the context of Kiribati, country ownership in terms of government engagement is very high (Tabualevu et al., 2020). Indeed, the program is mainly implemented through the GoK. However, questions around ownership remain. In chapter five I showed that there was a persistent lack of government funding to women's organizations in Kiribati. Whilst there might be high government involvement and engagement with Pacific Women, this does not correlate to ownership at the community or local level. Except for the establishment of the Kiribati Women and Children's Support Centre (KWCSC), limited Pacific Women funding goes directly to women's organizations indicating that Pacific Women may be reinforcing issues outlined in the CEDAW Shadow Report. This therefore contributes to an environment where civil society in Kiribati must compete with government ministries to receive donor funding. In the six-year Pacific Women evaluation, Kiribati women expressed some concern about the crowded funding space that is creating tensions and competition amongst local organisations and groups as they seek to position their organisations in the competition for more and continued funding. (Tabualevu et al., 2020, p. 40).

Conclusion: So how does Pacific women deal with the contradictory narratives?

There is no denying that Pacific Women funding and activities in Kiribati have contributed greatly to advancing gender equality and women's rights. The large amount of funding invested into activities aimed at addressing violence against women has seen improved access to services for women and children affected by violence. In particular, the establishment of the Kiribati Women and Children's Support Centre (KWCSC) has provided essential counselling and referral services. Much has been gained since the Kiribati country program began and there is still much more progress to be had.

In terms of dealing with the contradictory understandings of gender and culture in the Kiribati context, Pacific Women documents and activities do little to resolve these tensions. Kiribati worldviews and perspectives are often still missing from research, policy making and international aid and development spaces. Statements and assertations are often made about gender issues and culture in Kiribati with little regard to how contemporary gender inequities and certain "norms" have been influenced by a colonial past. Pacific Women documents highlight current gender statistics and research on the situation and the prevalence of issues relating to gender. However, there is no mention of the colonial experience in Kiribati. In glossing over this context, Pacific Women contributes to an understanding that gender inequality in Kiribati is largely due to a *patriarchal* and *oppressive* culture which needs addressing through continued development assistance. Furthermore, there is little recognition or attention paid to pre-colonial gender practices or conceptualizations within Pacific Women research, documents, or initiatives. Again, this leaves a large silence around the existence of gender practices that may have deviated from an imposed Western heteronormative gender system.

The continued silence of I-Kiribati women and scholars regarding these issues is also problematic. There was much to be unpacked and discussed with the Kiribati gender experts who were able to maroro with me about these issues, for example more fluid notions of gender and gender roles, perhaps also the existence of gender and sexually diverse identities. The insights these individuals

gave were invaluable to the current research, and yet their views are rarely found in literature or other gender policy making spaces. All the experts I was able to talk with indicated they felt strongly about the importance of te katei ni Kiribati. Embracing te katei ni Kiribati or Kiribati worldviews was seen as vital for any initiatives aimed at addressing gender inequality in Kiribati. Despite this, very few Pacific Women gender initiatives, documents or research promote a revitalization or reclamation of Kiribati culture to empower women or to promote peace within families perhaps except for the Strengthening Peaceful Villages (SPV) project. Initiatives in Aotearoa New Zealand by diaspora Kiribati community perhaps provide opportunities for cross-national learnings. The Maneaba Strategic Strategy and the Boutakan Te Mweeraoi framework meaningfully embrace Kiribati knowledge and cultural values to promote family wellbeing and peace within the home. The maneaba is seen as a powerful symbol of safety, community, and harmony under which everyone has a place and is respected. Furthermore, through the Boutakan te Mweeraoi framework Kiribati culture is seen as invaluable for informing respectful and healthy relationships. The framework highlights empowering aspects of Kiribati culture that promote equitable and respectful gender and family relations. Through an analysis of Pacific Women documents and initiatives it is evident that Kiribati perspectives and voices are missing when it comes to understanding the interplay between discourses of culture, colonisation, and gender. Whilst there is little to be found by way of formal research or written texts to further explore these issues, there are indeed rich sources of documented Kiribati knowledge that can be found. Once such source lies within the films of a well-known local film production company Nei Tabera ni Kai which I shall discuss in the following chapter.

Chapter Seven: How do Nei Tabera ni Kai films deal with contradictory gender narratives?

Introduction

Pacific film has been the subject of recent research that seeks to explore the potential of film as a site for self-determination and political agency within development spaces (Puka, 2019; Stupples et al 2021; Stupples & Teaiwa, 2017; Barclay, 2015; Woodward, 2015). As mentioned previously in this thesis, development initiatives in the Pacific tend to devalue the role or importance of Pacific worldviews and epistemologies. In Kiribati, this has been seen with a devaluing of indigenous knowledge since the colonial period. Today, development is often seen as a technical project whilst Pacific worldviews or knowledge are seen as an impediment to 'progress' (Goodyear-Ka'ōpua, 2017). Within gender and development discourses, Kiribati custom has been framed as being 'patriarchal' and oppressive towards women, and as such is often seen as a barrier to achieving gender equality. Whilst there are limited indigenous Kiribati voices within academia and policy making, increasingly film provides one space for indigenous filmmakers to explore, articulate and represent social issues outside of Western framings and offers the potential to decolonise the way indigenous knowledge(s) has often been so negatively framed within the development sector. Building on from the previous chapters, this chapter seeks to explore how Nei Tabera ni Kai, a film production unit in Kiribati, deals with the contradictory narratives of gender and culture in the Kiribati context. Does the NTNK film unit represent a decolonial space for doing and thinking about gender inequality, and development issues more broadly?

Nei Tabera ni Kai as a decolonial Kiribati voice?

There are numerous challenges in the Pacific region for the establishment of a flourishing film industry. Challenges remain around training, infrastructure, funding, and policy. None the less, in recent years there has been increased attention paid to the role of filmmaking as part of a strategy to contribute to decolonial development pathways (Puka, 2019; Stupples et al, 2020). Film can be an important medium for countering colonial imaginaries but also contemporary forms of

reductive representation when representation in the region has been dominated by the views of outsiders. However, the capacity for filmmaking differs across the region, as access to resources and opportunities remain uneven. In small island developing states, like Kiribati, the Government is hesitant to fund or invest in a creative arts sector. As such, non-state actors tend to play a significant role in supporting film projects. One such example of this is independent film production company the Nei Tabera ni Kai (NTNK) film unit in Kiribati.

Nei Tabera ni Kai (NTNK) is a small film unit located in the capital island of South Tarawa. Established by local I-Kiribati woman Linda Uan and her late husband John Anderson, a filmmaker from New Zealand. Nei Tabera ni Kai has produced nearly over 400 films that cover a wide array of topics focusing on issues affecting the lives of I-Kiribati. The films comprise documentaries, fictionized dramas, archival footage, and educational films. This rich collection of Kiribati films has led some to say that NTK captures the 'te katei ni Kiribati' or the Kiribati way (Teaiwa, 2019). Whilst not explicitly considered a gender initiative, some NTNK films deal with issues of gender violence, HIV/AIDS, healthy relationships, and other gendered social issues. The name itself 'Nei Tabera ni Kai' also represents Linda Uan's family totem. In Kiribati custom, every family clan relates to some plant, animal, or object which it holds in particular esteem (Grimble, 1989). Nei Tabera ni Kai, Uan's family totem, is responsible for love, healing and wellbeing and is closely associated with the feminine world (Teaiwa, 2019).

Compared to other film production companies in the region, NTNK is significantly under resourced and NTNK has not produced any films in the last few years. When attending the Maoriland Film festival in Wellington of 2019, Uan made a humble request for assistance to archive and digitise NTNK films. At the festival, Uan revealed a hard drive containing raw footage from her handbag and unwrapping it from a be (sarong). Uan revealed that the masters of her films were all being kept in 200 hard drives, stored in an unairconditioned room of the small NTNK office on South Tarawa (Teaiwa, 2019). The ability for filmmakers in the Pacific, like Uan, to be able to produce films is particularly challenging when working in independent island states with fewer resources. In the context of Kiribati, where the GDP is one of the lowest in the region, the national government is hesitant to support or develop a local film sector. Whilst Uan has been able to source some government funding for her film productions, NTNK films have often been funded

with the support of external development donors and other regional, international civil society organizations. Stupples et al (2020) have highlighted concern over donor support for indigenous Pacific film, as this limits the potential for the emergence of a commercial film industry in the region which could contribute to economic development.

Of particular interest to the current research is a NTNK drama series titled *Te Ribana.* This five-part fictional series covers a range of social issues as experienced by Nei Rianako, a young woman, and her family living on South Tarawa. As mentioned earlier, indigenous film has been identified as being a tool that challenges colonial representations of the region. In the context of Kiribati, the global economy of knowledge ensures that Western perspectives of gender continue to dominate policy making and international development spaces. So, might NTNK films represent a decolonial voice? How might these films challenge the coloniality of gender or deal with the contradictions of gender narratives?

Table 2: Brief Summary of the Films

Te Ribana 1 – Rongorongan Nei Rerebwan	Rianako gets caught sneaking off to meet her boyfriend Aata after dark. Whilst initially very angry with her, her family come together and maroro with Rianako around appropriate ways for young women and men to establish relationships with each other. The film emphasises the importance of parents being able to create safe spaces to talk with their children about developing healthy relationships. *Kiribati only, no subtitles, 96 mins*
Te Ribana 3 – Family Peace	Aana escapes her alcoholic and abusive husband, Iorim, and seeks refuge with her brother Teoti and the family (Rianako's father). The film focuses on domestic violence and alcoholism. Eventually Iorim

	seeks support from AA with the help of an old high school friend and begs for Aana's forgiveness. *Kiribati with English subtitles, 74 mins*
Te Ribana 5 – The Story of Tetaake	Tetaake runs away from home when no one believed her after her stepfather had made unwanted advances towards her. After moving around from place to place she finds refuge with an old school friend, Rianako and her family. Rianako's family shelter and protect her from her grandmother who tries to take her back to her mother and stepfather. *Kiribati with English subtitles, 78 mins*

Rikiara versus gender

There are important nuances between Western understandings of gender roles and Kiribati perspectives. An understanding of these nuances is important for challenging the 'coloniality of power' that exists within development spaces but also provides a lens through which to discuss NTNK films. A useful starting point for thinking about these nuances is in the translation of the word 'gender' into te taetae ni Kiribati, or the Kiribati language. Despite an emphasis on gender equality in recent years, there is no direct translation for the word 'gender' in the Kiribati language. In the past, difficulties in translating liberal notions of gender equality into Kiribati have been attributed to a simplistic and rudimentary language and culture (see Chapter Four). This framing of the Kiribati language and culture more generally, as rudimentary, and simplistic is an enduring colonial legacy that has perpetuated an understanding that te katei ni Kiribati, or Kiribati culture is incompatible with 'modern'/'universal' concepts of gender equality and human rights. However, over the last thirty years with the introduction of various international development and human rights frameworks, the translation of these into te taetae ni Kiribati, has provided a way to centre I-Kiribati perspectives into policy making and development spaces. The term chosen by the

ministry responsible for women, MWYSSA, to translate the Western term 'gender' is rikiara[8] (anonymous, personal communication, March 2021). The term rikiara literally translates to our way (the root word rikia referring to 'nature' or 'way' and ara referring to 'us'). In maroro with Tengare, a Kiribati woman who leads gender-based violence initiatives within New Zealand Kiribati communities, likened the concept of rikiara to "te ao Māori*"*[9] (Tengare, personal communication, January 2022), thus rikiara can be understood as the Kiribati way or a Kiribati worldview. In discussions with participants and even family members, rikia is not a term that is easily translated into English. Yet nonetheless, these discussions have revealed key differences between Western and Kiribati perspectives of gender.

Rikia encompasses everything that makes up an I-Kiribati person and informs the conduct and behaviour of different identities in Kiribati society. Rikia refers to the way you are brought up and the way your Kiribati identity should be. However, there is a key temporal aspect to rikia, it is not static and changes over time. Whilst gender as a term refers to boys and girls, man, and woman or male and female and the roles they have. Rikia is not specific to gender. Rikia instead refers to a set of behaviours, roles that are ascribed to different identities in Kiribati society that are not always or necessarily gendered, but otherwise. One's age, kinship ties, genealogy, birth order and others also are important for informing ones rikia. Thus, it is interesting that gender has been translated in such a way, highlighting that gender in Kiribati can never be understood as solely being about male and female identities. Rather rikia instead emphasises a more holistic and relational understanding of roles and social relations that go beyond isolated, binary categories of man and woman. Through an understanding of gender as rikiara*,* this points to a relational understanding of gender within Kiribati society. Many have written about the notion of 'relationality' in other Pacific contexts, which is a concept that recognises identity, culture, knowledge, spirituality, and all other aspects of life as being defined by relationships: that is, by webs of interconnection, reciprocity, agency and mutual obligations to other people and the world around us (George & Wiebe, 2020; Gegeo, 1998). Thus, gender in Kiribati is less about individual women and men than

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[8] It is important to note than explanations of rikiara discussed in this chapter are informed by the researchers own understanding/knowledge of Kiribati culture, as well as informed through maroro with others. No one voice can claim to represent an authoritative Kiribati voice.
[9] Te ao maori refers to the Maori worldview which acknowledges the interconnectedness and interrelationship of all living and non-living things (Tuhiwai-Smith, 2012).

it is about how anyone and everything – male, female, human, non-human – must engage and interact with each other in a way that maintains and supports peace and harmony. Through a rikiara perspective, how might NTNK films deal with gender?

Centrality of the family

A relational understanding of gender can be seen throughout the *Te Ribana* series. In the films we are introduced to Rianako, a young woman and her extended family. What becomes clear throughout these films is the centrality of the utu (family) in all aspects of Kiribati social life, with everyone embodying rikiia or their roles within the family. Images of family settings and the different roles and relationships within the family are evident throughout the film series indicating the centrality and importance of the family unit. Often the utu, typically comprised of multiple generations in one household, is depicted sitting, eating, and telling stories together. The social issues that are portrayed within the films are also inseparable from the wider family unit. This is seen with Rianako's romantic relationship and courtship with her boyfriend Aata in *Te Ribana 5-Rongorongon Nei Rerebwan*; the domestic abuse experienced by Aana when she seeks refuge with her brother Teaoti (Rianako's father) and the wider family in *Te Ribana 3 – Family Peace*, which I shall elaborate on below.

In traditional Kiribati society there are very strict rules and protocols around establishing romantic relationships particularly for young woman. When a young woman is caught meeting with men without the knowledge of her family, it is perceived as reflecting negatively on the whole family. In *Te Ribana 5: Rongorongon Nei Rerebwan*, after the family catches Rianako meeting with her boyfriend Aata in the dark the whole family engage in a lengthy maroro around proper protocols for establishing romantic relationships. Frome a Western feminist perspective, the strict control around a woman's movement and sexual choices might sit at odds with notions of sexual empowerment and liberation. However, through the film we see Rianako, and her family engaged in maroro around such a sensitive topic in a constructive and respectful way. The whole family discusses with each other aspects of Kiribati custom associated with courtship. They discuss how certain customs have emerged, and the ways in which some customs can be damaging for women and therefore may need adapting within contemporary society. At the end of the film, the family

resolve the issue and Rianako continues her relationship with Aata but this time with the approval of the whole family.

In *Te Ribana 3 – Family Peace*, Rianako's aunty Aana, seeks refuge with the family after experiencing domestic violence at the hands of her alcoholic husband. Domestic violence is a prevalent issue in Kiribati and has long been perceived as a private matter between husband and wife (Tabe, 2016). However, the film disrupts this narrative showing how domestic violence can be resolved by relying on community, friendships and wider family connections and not keeping it in the private sphere. Whilst Aana is seeking refuge with her brother, her husband Iorim seeks help for his addiction with the support of an old high school friend, Uriam (Rianako's Uncle). The depiction of Uriam approaching Iorim portrays a positive male relationship, whereby both men hold space for each other admitting to their own struggles with jealousy, insecurity, and alcoholism. Iorim then seeks out support from a community AA centre. After seeking treatment, Iorim approaches Aana's family bringing with him two uniwane or male elder relatives to formally apologise to her and the whole extended family. The film highlights the relationships affected when domestic violence occurs and that families, friends and communities must come together to support those affected. Iorim's apology also embodies this. Formal apologies, te kabwarabure, in Kiribati custom rarely occur between two individuals, but are often between two families, as a wrong committed by an individual is reflective of the family of that individual. Again, highlighting the centrality of a collective or family identity.

Not only does the content of the films highlight the centrality of the family, but the process of filmmaking itself also incorporates values of family and relationality. In maroro with a participant involved in the filming of the Te Ribana series, Taake notes;

> The other things we did like with Nei Rerebwan's story we, it was like te kabutiman, we went to the parents and asked we would very much like to have your daughter as part of our series and here are the things [we would like her to do]... it's like a kabutiman in a very different way… we don't want to do things and take short cuts, it required a lot of planning, a lot of thinking of what I need to do to get one from one stage to another, even though it took longer, I feel it was well worth it. (Taake, personal communication, February 14, 2022).

The process of film creation was informed largely by cultural values. Te kabutiman, refers to the traditional custom of arranging an engagement. This custom involves the families of the couple,

with the man’s family coming to humbly request for the daughter’s hand in marriage. It is usually elder family members who must be the ones to do the kabutiman. In this case, a similar protocol was used to ask permission from the families of the actors to have their daughters participate in the films. Taake also notes that to create the films the process required collaboration and establishing relationships with not only donors (both government and bilateral, multilateral development partners) but also with the communities in which the films took place and the families of the actors involved (Taake, 2022).

It’s not always about gender

Throughout the film series viewers witness Kiribati village life and the day-to-day running’s of a typical Kiribati household. Often the women in the family are depicted doing domestic chores such as hand-washing laundry or prepping and cooking food. Whilst the men in the family are depicted cutting toddy, fishing or building buia’s (local houses). What emerges through a rikia perspective, however, is that roles in the household are also determined by age just as much as they are gendered. Everyone is expected to a play a role in the family, but your roles and the types of behaviours you must enact also change through the different stages of life development – whether you are ataei (children), ataeinaine/ataeinimwane (unmarried young woman or man), aine/mwane (a married woman or man), or unaine/unimwane (elderly woman or man).

As discussed in chapter two, Pacific scholars have argued that gender relations sit at the intersection of other types of relations that are equally, if not more, important – for example, familial, generational, sociocultural, religious, and political relations. One cannot look at gender in isolation, as from a Kiribati worldview, you do not exist as an individual, rather you exist in relation to those around you. A rikia perspective of social roles and relations in a Kiribati household blurs a rigid, binary understanding of gender roles. Apparent gendered roles are not always so clear cut. In a society that can be considered gerontocratic, age is an important determinant of your social status. Thus, in the films it is the unimwane and unaine that are considered the decision-makers of the household. For example, in Te Ribana 3, when Aata’s family come to ask for Rianako’s hand in marriage, this important and formal conversation takes place between Aata’s grandmother and Rianako’s grandparents, Tebakatu and Tangaruru. As discussed previously, te kabutiman occurs between usually female members of the male’s family.

Furthermore, often Tebakatu and Tangaruru are often pictured leading discussions and making decisions for the household.

Whilst little is known of pre-colonial gender conceptualisations in Kiribati, the use of Uan's family spirit ancestor name, Nei Tabera ni Kai hints at the possibility that gender roles may not have always been delineated as they are now. In maroro with Riita, she maintains that there have been feminist practices evident within Kiribati culture that complicate certain narratives of tradition. One such example is the story of Nei Manganibuka (Riita, personal communication, January 2022). In the traditional Kiribati world, there is the existence of numerous spirit ancestors, who are often female and possess great wisdom and power. Nei Manganibuka translates to old woman of the Buka trees. In Tungaru (indigenous name for Kiribati) mythology, Nei Manganibuka taught the people of Tungaru the art of long-distance canoe navigation. Nei Manganibuka's story is significant as it hints at the possibility that Kiribati social roles might not have always been gendered but were based more on who was more suitable in the family to take on that role. Nei Manganibuka's father favoured her over her other male siblings and chose to teach her everything he knew about navigation (Tiroba, 1989). I parallel Nei Manganibuka's story to my own mother, who inherited her father's knowledge around canoe building. Although my grandfather was initially hesitant to share certain knowledge and skills with my mother that have predominately been viewed as 'masculine', notions of relationality at times exceed gender for the basis of imparting skills and determining gender roles. My mother played an important caring role for my grandfather and in act of reciprocity, he decided to impart his knowledge to her. Similarly, Nei Manganibuka was given the skills of canoe building and navigation by her father, due to the favouring of her over her brother. It could be suggested that roles in Kiribati may not solely be determined by gender. But perhaps attention also needs to be paid to other, potentially more salient features that may exceed gender, for example acts of reciprocity and kinship relationships.

Challenging Gender Stereotypes

The characters throughout the Te Ribana film series challenges certain gender stereotypes. Choosing how particular characters are portrayed in film is a political act and can be seen as an act of colonial resistance. Through the male characters in the series, the films offer a framing of Kiribati manhood and masculinity that deviates from mainstream stereotypes. Often men in

Kiribati society, particularly within development spaces, are characterised as being dominant, violent, jealous, and abusive. Whilst there are certainly characters in the films that resemble these tropes, it is done in a way that does not reinforce an essentialised understanding of Kiribati men as being innately violent and abusive. Rather, the men within Rianako's family are portrayed in empowering ways embodying positive I-Kiribati notions of masculinity. Viewers witness the fathers positively teaching their sons, men reaching out to support other men who are dealing with alcoholism or perpetrators of violence and husbands positively supporting their wives.

The films also contain empowering and strong I-Kiribati women characters. The young women in all the films are depicted with agency and a voice as they navigate the struggles and encounters, they face in relationships, work, school, and everyday life in urban South Tarawa. In Te Ribana 5 – The Story of Nei Tetaake, Nei Tetaake runs away from her sexually abusive stepfather. In her travels Nei Tetaake runs into an old school friend, Akineti, who is now working as a prostitute. Although prostitution is highly stigmatised in Kiribati society, as well as the idea of young women being sexually active Akineti is not framed in a negative way. Rather the film uses the character of Akineti to promote safe sex practices and sexual agency. In discussion with Tetaake she notes,

> Don't let any guy do anything you're not happy with. It's your body – not theirs. They call me a bitch on heat, prostitute, loose woman, ship girl – so many names I have. But if I don't like the guy, I don't go with him. And condoms – If he won't use them, he can take his dreams elsewhere. (Te Ribana 5, NTNK)

Sex is a highly taboo topic in Kiribati society, particularly so for young women. Thus, inclusion of Akineti's character and this conversation could be characterised as being quite radical or as colonial resistance given this context. There are indeed spaces in Kiribati contexts where sex is openly talked about and intertwined with humour, hinting at perhaps different pre-missionisation liberal sexual practices and attitudes.

Narratives of Culture

The representation of te katei ni Kiribati within these films challenges the reductivist way Kiribati culture is often framed within development spaces. Development spaces tend to position indigenous cultures as static, rigid and ancient. This reduces indigenous thinking and worldviews

to being unequipped for thinking about and dealing with contemporary issues which are better left to technocratic, modern, westernised solutions. However, the *Te Ribana* film series effectively demonstrates how a Kiribati worldview is not static and can provide us with solutions for contemporary issues. In *Te Ribana 1 – Rongorongon Nei Rerebwan*, Rianako and her family discuss aspects of Kiribati culture and romantic relationships between young people in society today. 'Traditionally' it has been unacceptable for young women to meet and form relationships with young men outside of the family home at night. Often these aspects of Kiribati culture are talked about within the literature as perpetuating attitudes that view women as inferior and submissive to men. Indeed, the restriction of women's mobility, sexuality and harmful narratives around female virginity are all complicit in shaping the lived experiences of women. Yet, Rianako and her extended family sit down and talk together or maroro through such a sensitive topic, discussing the ways in which certain traditional practices may no longer serve a purpose in contemporary society.

Within this discussion, Tebakatu (Rianako's grandfather) tells the story of Tekaai and his lover Ririere. In this story Tekaai, who is a well-known warrior from an island in the south arrives to a northern island where he meets a young woman called Ririere. Tekaai did not know this woman or who her family was. They fell in-love and ran away. Every child they had was cursed and would die shortly after or was born still born. Ririere's family eventually found them and told them that they were related and if they chose to stay together, they would be forever cursed, so Ririere left. The purpose of telling this story was to talk about how particular customs and practices emerge. In this case, the tight control over women's movements and sexuality is tied to a context where incest was a major threat to the survival and security of families in precolonial Kiribati and seen as an act punishable by death on some islands (Grimble, 1989). One needed to know their prospective spouse's family tree to secure land and resources but also to ensure the succession of the clan. The family discuss how it is within this context that there is a certain custom and way of going about establishing marriages, always being between two families and never between the two individuals. Following the telling of this story the family then go into a nuanced and in-depth discussion, around aspects of Kiribati culture.

Conclusion: So, what does this mean?

Nei Tabera ni Kai (NTNK) represents a unique indigenous I-Kiribati voice in a context where literature has long framed Kiribati perspectives in reductive ways. Kiribati culture is simultaneously framed as the cause and solution of contemporary gender issues; however, these competing narratives have varying degrees of power and influence. In development spaces there is a risk of reinforcing colonial hierarchies and relationships and a need to resist reductive framings of Kiribati knowledge. Framings of te katei ni Kiribati, or Kiribati culture, as being patriarchal and as a barrier to achieving gender equality, are useful for highlighting and making visible the marginalisation of women but risk further contributing to the 'coloniality of power'. Throughout this chapter the research attempted to analyse NTNK films as a potential decolonial voice within the gender and development space in Kiribati and to understand how NTNK film deals with the contradictory understandings that exist around gender and culture.

Whilst much literature, research and media has been written about Kiribati, often from non-I-Kiribati, NTNK films represents one of the few local and indigenous voices representing social issues in Kiribati. The *Te Ribana* series portrays and deals with gendered issues that draw on indigenous values and modes of storytelling. Rianako and her extended family represent the 'typical' Kiribati family living in South Tarawa. The family share their experiences, perspectives, and beliefs with the audience, reflecting the lived realities of many living in South Tarawa. This creative mode of storytelling provides an alternative framing/reading of development issues rather than imposing a formal account of 'the facts' through reports, statistics, and other evidence-based policy making and development. Furthermore, the distribution of NTNK films to all outer islands was also able to bridge the logistical challenges associated with travel to outer islands. This equitable distribution of knowledge challenges the way in which development is usually done with many feeling as though outer islands in Kiribati are left out of much needed development assistance. The films represent an I-Kiribati filmmaking approach with the use of local people as actors, the use of the Kiribati language, filming in real places, scenes of very real and lived experiences and challenges of Kiribati people and the interconnection these lives have with tradition, globalisation, patriarchy, and colonization.

The process of filmmaking and the content of the films clearly demonstrates the centrality of the *utu* and values of community and relationality. Indeed, an allegiance to a collective identity can be found throughout the Pacific and as such, gender equality or feminism more broadly can never just be about liberating individual women (Naepi, 2016; Griffen, 1984). Lugones (2010) argues that the *coloniality of gender* worked to destroy the importance of indigenous communal identities and selves. In doing so, this not only marginalised gender and sexually fluid indigenous identities but also afforded indigenous men patriarchal power and authority over indigenous women, destroying more egalitarian and complementary relationships. From a decolonial feminist perspective, feminist or gender approaches that do not allow us to see beyond binary understandings of man and woman are complicit in maintaining the modern/colonial gender system. In the same manner, gender equality narratives that do not allow for an understanding of indigenous I-Kiribati ontologies, for example rikiara, can also be seen as reinforcing the 'coloniality of gender'. Thus, NTNK films offer a significant decolonial reading of I-Kiribati gender and family social relations.

However large questions remain regarding Kiribati's colonial past and the place of LGBTQIA+ identities. The films are very careful in dealing with sensitive gender issues in a way that respects longstanding conservative views around gender and sex as well as te katei ni Kiribati. Topics such as domestic abuse are very clearly positioned as "tiaki ara katei" or not our culture and are discussed and resolved through Kiribati cultural values of family, reciprocity, and relationality. However, there is no explicit discussion of how colonization may have played a role in contributing to the social issues portrayed in the films. Yet often the issues in the film are tied to globalisation, urbanisation and environmental issues associated with climate change (as evidenced by Uan's narration in certain films). From a decoloniality perspective however it can be argued that these contemporary systems are inextricably linked to a colonial history of exploitation and domination in the region. The emphasis on communal and collective ontologies in the films follows Lugones call to go beyond gender, to see communal selves and egalitarian indigenous relations that were destroyed or devalued with the imposition of the modern/colonial gender system. Yet, it should be noted that within the films there is still a large silence around traditional non-binary identities. The films do little to address the existence of and struggles of binabinaine and other LGBTQIA+ identities in Kiribati, as such heteronormative understandings of gender remain.

Conclusion: So how do NTNK and deal with contradictory narratives – do they resolve or reproduce tensions?

Introduction

This thesis has explored the various underpinnings of contradictory narratives of gender and culture in the Kiribati context. In recent years, there has been a growing emphasis by the Kiribati Government and its development partners on addressing issues of gender inequality. External ideas, theories, and conceptions around 'gender' and 'gender equality' have increasingly 'travelled' into the Pacific region, informing regional gender frameworks and national policies. These ideas have influenced the types of gender initiatives brought into Kiribati and with this new emphasis on gender equality and women's rights, there has been great steps towards advancing the status of women, but also more importantly, equitable relations between all genders. However, this thesis has also demonstrated there continues to be a contradiction in the way contemporary gender inequities in Kiribati are understood. Kiribati 'culture' is simultaneously framed as the cause of and solution to gender equality. On the one hand, Kiribati is a patriarchal society, where violence against women is traditionally accepted and normalised. On the other, violence is vehemently denied as being a part of Kiribati culture. This thesis has demonstrated that where these narratives stem from and who voices them, matters.

In the Pacific, powerful narratives and counternarratives of culture play a role in shaping politics, policy making, and development. One line of argument that holds disproportionate weighting in policy making is that culture or custom presents an impediment to desired development outcomes. This type of framing reduces indigenous knowledge and perspectives to being incompatible with more progressive, technical, and western development. Scholars have warned that without critically interrogating these counter cultural narratives, there is risk of legitimizing external hegemony and domination in the region (Naidu, 2019; Hooper, 2009). On the other hand, there are also powerful narratives of culture that are used to justify harmful practices towards the region's most vulnerable, including women, members of the LGBTQIA+ and those with disabilities. Often espoused by male political elites, but also women, are narratives that claim the need to 'maintain' or 'preserve' culture, often used when discussing gender equality or LGBTQIA+ rights. These "selective patriarchal pickings and constructions of culture" (Tusitala

Marsh, 2000, p. 152) have been challenged by Pacific scholars. It is within this context that the current thesis has sought to critically interrogate narratives and counternarratives of ‘culture’ and ‘gender’ in the Kiribati context; not only to resist colonial logics but also sexist and homophobic currents (Underhill-Sem, 2020).

To do this, the research sought to answer the following research questions.

1. What are the historical contexts in which understandings of ‘gender’ and ‘gender roles’ have emerged in Kiribati?
2. What understandings of gender do Pacific Women and NTNK work with and what narratives do they (re)produce?
3. How do contemporary gender initiatives resolve or reproduce contradictions in the way culture and gender is understood in Kiribati?

This concluding chapter shall provide a summary of the main findings of the research. In respect to question one, understandings of gender and gender roles have been shaped by a colonial history, and again through the rise of feminist movements within development. Through Maria Lugones concept of the coloniality of gender, the thesis has complicated heteronormative assumptions of gender in Kiribati. The existence of indigenous sexual and gender diverse practices points to the possibility that gender roles and relations in Kiribati may not have always been so rigid and heteronormative. Furthermore, collective epistemologies and ontologies in Kiribati point to other ways that gender may have been theorised in pre-colonial Kiribati society. Secondly, and related to the first, narratives of gender and culture in Kiribati have also been shaped by international and regional gender frameworks. Lastly, insights of Kiribati women and Nei Tabera ni Kai films provide ways to reconceptualise gender, and partially resolve the contradictory narratives of ‘culture’ and ‘gender’. However, this thesis also concludes that large tensions remain particular around the inclusion of LGBTQIA+ identities.

The Coloniality of Gender and Unsettling Gender Narratives in Kiribati

Much of life in Kiribati, like elsewhere in the Pacific region, is heavily intertwined with Christianity and various churches. There is a large silence and at times uneasiness expressed when discussing the influence that colonization has played in shaping life in Kiribati today. This topic is often glossed over or avoided altogether by Kiribati scholars or within research and literature pertaining to Kiribati. There is no denying that Christianity and religion, accompanying discourses and values, remain one of the most enduring legacies of colonization in the region. Yet, how does one begin to disentangle accepted cultural norms and narratives from its colonial roots, particularly when they are now so intertwined. To begin unpacking these issues this thesis relied on the work of Latin American scholars from the decoloniality school of thought. From this, a key concept informing the thesis is the notion of 'coloniality'. Coloniality is a concept that views the era of decolonization that occurred in the late twentieth century as an unfinished project. From this perspective, although countries of the global south gained political independence, enduring colonial processes and systems continue to shape contemporary life in these countries perpetuating colonial relations of power between the global north and the global south – i.e., coloniality. For scholars from this school of thought, central to the colonial project was the construction of race (Quijano, Mignolo) and later argued by Maria Lugones, the construction of gender. The construction of race and gender worked to create new racialised and gendered hierarchies, modelled on European values. According to Lugones the 'coloniality of gender' imposed a new gender system upon indigenous peoples, where perhaps no gender existed at all. This new gender system imposed a heteropatriarchal hegemony within indigenous societies and became an essential tool of the colonial project. In the Kiribati context, there is very limited written texts on indigenous conceptions of gender. It is an impossible task to ascertain what pre-colonial gender systems may have looked like, although the concept of rikia offers some helpful insights. However, the coloniality of gender provide a relevant framework for considering the role that colonization has played in shaping understandings of gender in Kiribati.

The thesis found that through the arrival of Christianity, early missionaries imposed a reordering of the family and gender roles based according to Western, Christian values. This created what scholars have called the myth of female domesticity, but also worked to eradicate sexual and gender practices that deviated from Western Christian norms. In the context of Kiribati, this saw the slow irrelevance of traditional hamlets known as the 'kainga' and the creation of the 'village' and households that began to resemble European social life. This physical reordering of social life, confined women to the home and restricted activities to chores and tasks that aligned with the early missionary's understandings of a good Christian wife. Simultaneously, Kiribati men were afforded Eurocentric patriarchal power (albeit limited and highly controlled) in the colony, through access to formal Western education and eventual public positions within the colony. Meanwhile, traditional customs and practices were disavowed and marginalised further entrenching the imposition of heteronormative gender practices. The result of this is the silencing and marginalization of other ways to think and do gender in Kiribati. A key finding from the research reveals an uncomfortable silence that remains within discussions of queer identities, but also a large silence around the ways colonization has contributed to gender inequities in Kiribati today. Although visibility has increased in recent years through the establishment of BIMBA, Kiribati's first LGBTQIA+ organization, binabinaine and binabinamwane identities remain stigmatised and are often viewed as not being part of traditional culture. Further, there is little discussion of gender practices that may have deviated from Western gender systems, like in other parts of the Pacific. This silencing contributes to the perpetuation of contradictory narratives of gender and culture in the Kiribati context, as it is difficult to acknowledge or address aspects that are present in our culture that may not have always been so.

Gender initiatives and the coloniality of gender

The second key finding was that contemporary gender and development initiatives, including Pacific Women, do little to resolve contradictions by not providing spaces to decolonise understandings of gender in the Kiribati context. Over the years, various regional and international gender equality frameworks have also influenced the types of activities brought to Kiribati. The ratification of CEDAW, the Pacific Platform for Action as well as the Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Agreement have all resulted in action at the national level. However, understandings of

gender within these frameworks do little to disrupt long held conservative views around gender. Furthermore, the place of LGBTQIA+ identities remain uncomfortably on the edge. In Chapter Five, this thesis illustrated that Kiribati gender initiatives in the early 2000s largely reflected an 'add women and stir' approach. These kinds of gender initiatives, focused solely on including or adding women into development with little regard for the complex nature of women's lives. In the Kiribati context, the nature of these activities certainly contributed to long held misconceptions that gender equality is only being about women.

In Chapter Six, the analysis of Pacific Women documents found that there were limited opportunities within the Kiribati country program to discuss and unpack the complex nature of gender inequality in Kiribati. Although the Kiribati Government is highly involved within the implementation of the programme, Pacific Women evaluation reports hinted that there was a perceived lack of ownership or understanding of gender concepts at the community level, with I-Kiribati men and women reporting that gender initiatives were 'changing their culture'. These views sit in contrast with Kiribati gender experts who maintain that gender equality initiatives must be rooted within Kiribati cultural values and approaches, arguing that respect and gender equality can indeed be found in te katei ni Kiribati or the Kiribati way. The contradiction in understanding hints at a lack of involvement or ownership by local communities when designing these initiatives.

Whilst there is no denying that Pacific Women, among the many other gender initiatives, has made a positive impact towards achieving gender equality in Kiribati – the research raises concerns around the sustainability of these actions when funding runs out or the contract ends. If there continues to be a perceived lack of ownership at the community level, there is the risk that the ideas and messages within these programs are not sustainable. Without spaces to decolonise ideas of gender and gender roles, or to conceptualise these notions from a Kiribati perspective or approach, then gender equality initiatives in the Kiribati context are limited in what they can achieve in the long-term. The last key finding thus concludes that the incorporation of Kiribati knowledge provides a way to decolonise ideas around gender but could also contribute to long term, sustainable gender equality.

Use of Kiribati knowledge for decolonial gender equality

The last key finding of the current research is that meaningful incorporation of Kiribati knowledge(s) in development could provide ways to decolonise views on gender and lead to sustainable gender equality. All the women whom the research held maroro with felt strongly that gender equality initiatives needed to be rooted within traditional Kiribati values and approaches, with most asserting that Kiribati culture is needed for addressing these issues. The views of these women, who have long worked within gender spaces in Kiribati or with diaspora Kiribati communities in Aotearoa New Zealand, align with the narratives of culture and gender that seek to meaningfully revitalise Kiribati culture as the solution to gender inequality. However, this thesis has shown there are major power imbalances between these contradictory narratives, given a long colonial history of systematically devaluing Kiribati knowledge. Without centring Kiribati perspectives, there is the risk of perpetuating colonial relations. However, this thesis has also demonstrated that without also being critical of cultural narratives there is the risk of perpetuating attitudes and beliefs that are certainly present within our societies but not of them, particularly when it comes to the inclusion of LQBTIA+ and MPVFAFF+ Identities.

Looking to the translation of gender into the Kiribati language revealed key nuances between Western and Kiribati understandings of gender. The ministry responsible for women, MWYSSA, uses the term rikiara for gender. The key difference being that rikiara literally translates to 'our way' and can be understood broadly as a Kiribati worldview or a Kiribati way. Rikia encompasses everything that makes up an I-Kiribati person and informs the conduct and behaviour of different identities in Kiribati society. Rikia is not specific to gender. Rikia instead refers to a set of behaviours, roles that are ascribed to different identities in Kiribati society that are not always or necessarily gendered. One's age, kinship ties, genealogy, birth order and others also are important for informing ones rikia. Thus, it is interesting that gender has been translated in such a way, highlighting that gender in Kiribati can never be understood as solely being about male and female identities. Rather rikia instead emphasises a more holistic and relational understanding of roles and social relations that go beyond isolated, binary categories of man and woman. Through an understanding of gender as rikiara*,* this points to a relational understanding of gender within Kiribati society. Thus, gender in Kiribati is less about individual women and men than it is about

how anyone and everything – male, female, human, non-human – must engage and interact with each other in a way that maintains and supports peace and harmony.

Nei Tabera ni Kai films offer a significant decolonial reading of I-Kiribati social relations. The films represent one of only a handful of indigenous Kiribati perspectives on gender inequality issues. The films illustrate the importance and centrality of the utu, or family, in Kiribati life, particularly when dealing with gender inequality issues. The films demonstrate how women's lives in Kiribati are intimately connected within their families and wider communities. Lugones (2010) argues that the *coloniality of gender* worked to destroy the importance of indigenous communal identities and selves. From a decolonial feminist perspective, feminist or gender approaches that do not allow us to see beyond binary understandings of man and woman are complicit in maintaining the modern/colonial gender system. In the same manner, gender equality narratives that do not allow for an understanding of indigenous I-Kiribati ontologies, for example rikiara, can also be seen as reinforcing the 'coloniality of gender'.

However large questions remain regarding Kiribati's colonial past and the place of LGBTQIA+ identities. The films are very careful in dealing with sensitive gender issues in a way that respects longstanding conservative views around gender and sex as well as te katei ni Kiribati. Topics such as domestic abuse are very clearly positioned as "tiaki ara katei" or not our culture and are discussed and resolved through Kiribati cultural values of family, reciprocity, and relationality. However, there is no explicit discussion of how colonization may have played a role in contributing to the social issues portrayed in the films. Yet often the issues in the film are tied to globalisation, urbanisation and environmental issues associated with climate change (as evidenced by Uan's narration in certain films). From a decoloniality perspective however it can be argued that these contemporary systems are inextricably linked to a colonial history of exploitation and domination in the region. The emphasis on communal and collective ontologies in the films follows Lugones call to go beyond gender, to see communal selves and egalitarian indigenous relations that were destroyed or devalued with the imposition of the modern/colonial gender system. Yet, it should be noted that within the films there is still a large silence around traditional non-binary identities. The films do little to address the existence of and struggles of binabinaine and other LGBTQIA+ identities in Kiribati, as such heteronormative understandings of gender remain. As such Kiribati

culture will continue to be simultaneously framed as the cause of and solution to gender inequality, until the colonial matrices of power are exposed and efforts are made to decolonise, leaving room for indigenous expressions of diverse relationships and subjectivities to emerge and flourish.

Appendix

Appendix A	Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form
Appendix B	PPA National Kiribati Plan Activities Implemented in Kiribati from 1997-2001
Appendix C	Actions in the First, Second and Third Kiribati CEDAW Periodic Reports

Appendix A

Te Wānanga o Waipapa | School of Maori Studies and Pacific Studies,
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Waipapa Taumata Rau | The University of Auckland,
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PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET
Project title: Gender and Development Discourse in Kiribati

Student researcher: Ms Roi Burnett
Name of Supervisor: Assoc Prof Yvonne Underhill-Sem

Ko na mauri

Who am I?

My name is Roi Burnett. I am currently doing my research Master's in Pacific studies at the University of Auckland. I am of Kiribati and European ancestry. My mother is from the islands of Beru and Onotoa and my father is European Australian.

What is my research about?

Indigenous Pacific knowledge and ways of thinking have often been undermined historically by Western research practices. This has contributed to repeated calls for better recognising indigenous worldviews as the basis for any initiatives with Pacific people. This can be seen in initiatives such as the Boutokaan te Mweeraoi Framework for addressing family violence and wellbeing amongst Kiribati communities in Aotearoa.

Yet, the international aid development sector is often criticised for being driven by Western values and understandings. Recently terms such as human rights, women's empowerment and gender equality have become mainstream. Incorporation of these ideas in Pacific contexts has had mixed results. Sometimes leading to ineffective or negative outcomes for Pacific people, particularly when failing to take into account indigenous worldviews and local contexts.

Recently, there has also been an increased focus on gender and development in the Republic of Kiribati. But what does gender equality mean from a traditional Kiribati worldview? And how is gender understood in a Kiribati context?

I'm interested in exploring these questions in my study by analysing two initiatives in Kiribati to understand how they are informed by and produce certain understanding of gender - a larger Australian DFAT funded project, Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development, and a more 'locally-driven' initiative, 'Nei Tabera ni Kai' film series.

What do you need to do in this research?

Should you be interested in participating in this research, participation would involve a one-on-one online maroro session with me. This could be on zoom, WhatsApp or over the phone. Maroro will be in English. However, I have an understanding of conversational Kiribati so you can use te taetae ni Kiribati if that allows you to express yourself better.

In maroro sessions you and I will maroro (talk) together about your experiences having worked in gender-related fields in the context of Kiribati and/or with Kiribati communities in Aotearoa New Zealand. I would also love to hear about your own thoughts around Kiribati perspectives of gender and gender roles.

You will only need to do one maroro session and you can say as little or as much as you would like. Maroro could take up to an hour. We can arrange a maroro at a time and date that is appropriate for you.

Prior to our maroro I will also ask you for your permission to audio record our session. This is so I can capture your words as accurately as possible. Your participation is voluntary and **you have the right to withdraw from the maroro itself at any point without having to give a reason. Please read the consent form below before providing your informed consent.**

What am I going to do with your information/data?

I will transcribe our maroro session and then give you the option of receiving a written transcript of what was said and/or the recording of the maroro itself.

You have the right to withdraw your information from the study up to two weeks after receiving a copy of your transcript or two weeks after your maroro should you choose not to receive a copy of your transcript. You do not have to provide a reason should you choose to withdraw your information.

I will store the recordings and transcripts as an electronic file in a University of Auckland-approved online cloud. I will store this for the next 6 years and it will only be accessible by myself and my research supervisor. After this time period, data will be destroyed in a secure manner. Your recorded informed consent will be stored in a separate University of Auckland-approved dropbox account, and stored for the same period of time before being deleted permanently.

Anonymity and Confidentiality

I will endeavour to keep your identity confidential. When publishing the findings the use of pseudonyms or code names will be used in place of your real name and no personal, identifiable information will be shared or published in this research.

However given the smallness of the Kiribati community, you may be identifiable based on your responses. To further recognise this, the research will not ask questions that might undermine your position/reputation in the community.

Te bwai n tangira

As a way to express appreciation for your time in participating in this study and the valuable knowledge shared with me, you will be gifted the equivalent of $50 AUD. This will be sent via Western Union or through a means that you suggest.

Conflict of Interest

For reasons of transparency it should also be noted that you have been identified for this research through my own networks within the Kiribati community and based on your own public professional role.

Publication

The findings from this study will be published in a thesis as part of the requirements for a Master's thesis in Pacific Studies, at the University of Auckland.

Contact Details

If you have any questions about the research you can contact myself, my research supervisor or the Head of School of Pacific Studies. Please see the contact details below;

- Student Researcher, Ms Roi Burnett: rbur613@aucklanduni.ac.nz

- Research Supervisor, Assoc Professor Yvonne Underhill-Sem: y.underhill-sem@auckland.ac.nz
- Pacific Studies HOS, Dr Jemaima Tiatia-Seath: j.tiatia-seath@auckland.ac.nz

UAHPEC Chair contact details:
For any queries regarding ethical concerns you may contact the Chair, The University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee, Office of Research Strategy and Integrity, The University of Auckland, Private Bag 92019, Auckland 1142. Telephone 09 373-7599 ext. 83711. Email: humanethics@auckland.ac.nz

Approved by the University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee on 24/11/2022 for three years. Reference Number UAHPEC23500.

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CONSENT FORM

YOUR INFORMED CONSENT WILL BE AUDIO RECORDED AND WILL BE HELD FOR A PERIOD OF 6 YEARS.

Project title: Gender and Development Discourse in Kiribati

Student researcher: Ms Roi Burnett
Name of Supervisor: Assoc Prof Yvonne Underhill-Sem

I have read the Participant Information Sheet, have understood the nature of the research and why I have been selected. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have had them answered to my satisfaction.

- I agree to take part in this research.
- I agree to be audio recorded.
- I understand that I am free to withdraw my participation at any time, and can withdraw any data traceable to me up to two weeks following receipt of my transcript or following participation in maroro.
- I understand that although the study will attempt to keep my identity confidential, I may be identifiable based on my responses and due to the smallness of the wider Kiribati community.

Do you agree with the above statements? Please express your answer verbally to the researcher before your maroro begins.

Now please look through the following statements.

- I wish / do not wish to have my recordings returned to me. (Please express your answer verbally to the researcher before your maroro begins)
- I wish / do not wish to receive a transcript of my maroro for editing. (Please express your answer verbally to the researcher before your maroro begins)
- I wish / do not wish to receive the summary of findings (Please express your answer verbally to the researcher before your maroro begins).

If you indicated 'I wish' to any of the above, please provide your email details to the researcher.

Approved by the University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee on 24/11/2022 for three years. Reference Number UAHPEC23500.

Appendix B

PPA National Kiribati Plan Activities Implemented in Kiribati from 1997-2001

Issue of Concern	Activity	Funding Source(s)
Health	Pelvic Health Workshops	AUSAID, PACFAW and GOK
	AMAK'S involvement on AIDS task team	WHO and MOH
	Data on AIDS	PACFAW
	Promotion of KFHA services	IPPF/MOH
	Understanding health problems caused by domestic violence	NZODA and UNIFEM
	Virtue workshops/peaceful homes/better parenting	KFHA/IPPF/NCW/GOK
Education	Data for women's status in educational achievements, enrolments in different sectors, and scholarship awards as provided in the Status of Women Report for gender advocacy purposes.	Bread for the world via PACFAW
Violence Against Women	Domestic Violence Awareness Workshops	UNIFEM, DFID, PACFAW and GOK
	Police training in Domestic Violence	NZODA, GOK, NCW
Economic Empowerment	Handicraft selling by women's groups	Self-funded
	Sewing, catering, handicraft making trainings	Trainees pay their own fees
	Expansion of women's centres	Canada, Women NGOs
	Cake making and Decoration	Canada, NZODA
	Start Your Business Workshops, microcredit	NZODA, PACFAW and GOK
	Gender Seminar and introducing CV writing to the KWTNA	PACFAW, NCW
	Letters of request to TUC to consider lowering fees charged by low-income marketers	NCW, GOK
	Research on Gender and Trade	PACFAW
	Construction of women's maneaba	Women NGOs/NCW
	Solar lighting on outer islands to allow wider choice for women in weaving and fish processing	EU and GOK
	Seaweed processing or making food items from seaweed	Seaweed company sending female agent to workshop in Fiji
	Consultation with women groups on handicraft standardization	GOK and major women's NGOs
	Establishment of a market	Chinese Government, GOK, and local councils
	Food security in rural communities	APO
	Handicraft exhibition	JICA/GOK
	Drum oven?	SPC/GOK
Decision Making	Women in Politics support program was arranged prior to the elections of 1998	UNIFEM
	Leadership workshops conducted in urban and rural areas	NZODA, GOK, PACFAW
	Applying leadership skills in parenting	GOK and PACFAW
	Data on decision making for gender advocacy purposes	
Fisheries and Agriculture	Encouraging gardening and consumption of green leaves for balanced diet	AMAK, FSP, GOK
	Pricing of garden foodstuff	FAO, GOK, and buyers
	Establishment of the botanical garden serving purpose of medicinal plants	CANADA, GOK, and Maurin Kiribati Federation
	Involving women in seaweed farming workshops	EU and GOK
	Research on assessment of best practices, gaps, and resources in science	UNESCO
	Involving women from National Council of Women to attend Floriculture workshops at USP	SPREP and USP
	Workshops for office cleaners at Tarawa Technical Institute	Self-sponsored attendance?
Family and Cultural Values	Encouraging women healers through workshops where their knowledge is documented under their names.	WHO and GOK
	Building stronger families through virtues workshops incorporating Kiribati values	NZODA

Mechanisms to Promote Women's Advancement	Steps towards ratification of CEDAW	DFID, UNIFEM, PACFAW and NCW
	Participation of the Women's Office in ILO Workshops.	PACFAW, NCW
Information System on Women's Situation	Data and analysis compilation for gender advocacy purposes.	NZODA, PACFAW
	Newsletter and radio programs	NZODA
	Training on Information Technology	NZODA JICA

Sources: (Tekanene, 2004)

Appendix C

Actions in the First, Second and Third Kiribati CEDAW Periodic Reports

Article	Activity	Time Period	Funding Source(s)
Article 1 and 2: Definition of discrimination and obligations to eliminate discrimination against women	Black Thursday was introduced by GoK, as part of 16 days of Activism	2009	Unknown
	Removal of the gender discriminatory corroboration rule in rape cases	2003	Unknown
	CEDAW translated into the I-Kiribati language	2005	RRRT
	GoK endorsed the Elimination of Sexual and GBV (ESGBV) Policy and National Action Plan (2011-2021).	2010	Unknown
	Gender Equality and Women's Development Policy developed as part of obligations related to the Beijing conference for Women in 1995 to create a 'Women's Development Policy'	2018	Unknown
	GoK has incorporated human rights principles into national legislation (See report for list)	2013-2015	Unknown
	Gender stocktakes exercise	2013	SPC
Article 3: Guarantee of basic human rights and fundamental freedoms	Gender equality and the elimination of GBV into curriculum developed under education reforms. Moral Education curriculum introduced into year seven	2018	MWYSSA, MoE
	Women's Development Division (WDD) established, formally known as the Women's Unit, a two-person unit	2014	MWYSSA
	Leadership skills training at community level to increase presence of women in formal decision-making bodies, a Woman in Politics group formed	Date unknown	Unknown
Article 5: Sex roles and Stereotyping	Community consultation and training to all outer islanders by MoE, other ministries and major churches. The theme was "Our Children: Our Future' about education for all. Consultation subsequently have continued with a focus on Positive Parenting.	2011	MoE
	National women's machinery carried out national awareness on human rights, how gender is usually defined by culture, and how both men and women can benefit from sharing family responsibilities.	2013	SPC RRT UNWomen
	Human rights and gender-based violence were integrated in to a new 'Healthy Living curriculum'. There are three components to this curriculum: 1) Moral Education 2) Physical Education 3) Health Education	?? Date unknown	MoE
	A male advocacy program established; a group of men who are advocates against violence against women	2013	Unknown
	Development of respectful relationships programme in JSS schools	2015	MWYSSA and MoE
	Kiribati Family Health Association and KRCS work with and empower at risk youth groups to know their SRHR and to access sexual health services	2016	KFHA
Article 7: Participation in Political and Public Life	Mock Women's Parliament	2011	MWYSSA
Article 10: Education	Kiribati developed an Inclusive Education Policy to support the Education Act	2015	Unknown
	Gender, disability, and social inclusion considerations were mainstreamed into the principles underpinning the Kiribati Education Act 2013	2013	MoE

Article 11: Employment	Part XII of the Employment and Industrial Relations Code 2015 inserted to domesticate the principle of prohibiting the discrimination on grounds of race, colour, sex, religion, political, national extraction, social origin, disability etc	2015	MEHR
	Provisions made for paid maternity leave under EIRC	2015	MEHR
Article 13: Economic and Social Benefits	The Women's Divisions created a specific position for Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE) to oversee programs for omen on the outer islands	2015	MWYSSA
	Promotion of locally made traditional wear, now all government workers must wear locally made shirts every Friday to support locally owned clothing businesses	2016	Unknown
	Small scale, locally owned "Te Karekare" initiative started by outer island women. Each woman in the group pays an amount of money or puts in a particular resource, the funds are then paid out to a member of the group determined by straw poll	Date unknown	Unknown
	Women's interests are represented at the island council level	Date unknown	Unknown
Article 14: Rural Women	Trainings are offered to women in rural areas ranging from sewing, running a small business, gardening to awareness building on human rights	Date unknown	Unknown
	Research undertaken to identify the needs of women on outer islands	2021	MWYSSA

Source: (GoK, 2019)

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