

***SeaChanges* Land and Living and Loving: Women Scholars of Religion and Theology over 10 Years¹**

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Every morning as Clem Tapihana looks out the window of his beach home at Maketu, he greets the god of the ocean, Tangaroa, with a karakia. Mr. Tapihana, 62, was born and bred in the small town near Te Puke, where in Maori tradition the Arawa canoe landed. He learned his knowledge of the sea from his father, and yesterday he passed some of it on to his grand daughter, Miracal, 6, when he took her out to fish for flounder. “The *maona* [sea] has always been a central part of my family and Iwis’s life—it’s our main source of *kaimoana* [seafood], it’s the first place that our ancestors touched upon arriving here.”

But when he heads out onto the sea today, things will not be quite the same.

“I was always told that the *moana* is our *taonga* [treasure] and that we [Maori] own it. My father and his father before him told us not to let anyone take it away from us because we never conceded our rights to anything. I tell my *mokopuna* [grandchildren] the same thing and to keep on fighting the system if it gets in their way.” (*New Zealand Herald*, 18 December 2003).

¹ This paper was presented as the inaugural address at the third conference of Women Scholars of Religion and Theology, a regional scholarly association with members in Polynesia, Melanesia, South-East Asia, New Zealand and Australia: the South-Western Pacific region, held in Melbourne in January, 2004. As a founding member of the association, I was invited to provide an account of the association since its founding in the early 1990’s for the conference. It is published as the opening paper in this edition of *SeaChanges* as a way of preserving this piece of women’s history in the Pacific region. The second and third articles in this edition have also been developed from papers delivered at the 2004 conference.

That *seachanges land* and that both are intricately interconnected is evident in the struggle in New Zealand at present over the ownership of the foreshore and seabed represented in this somewhat controversial text which appeared in the December 18, 2003 edition of the *New Zealand Herald* under the heading “Lore of the Sea versus Law”. It represents a significant contextual element which arose to challenge and to sharpen my evoking of the title of the Women Scholars of Religion and Theology association’s e-journal *SeaChanges* as I reflected back on ten years of women scholars of religion and theology in the region. As I explored further the metaphor and the materiality of the sea in this region, the sea which intimately connects the region, I learned from an article of Sevati Tuwera’s that:

(i)n a good number of Pacific languages the word ‘womb’ is also used for ‘land.’ The best examples are *fanua* (Samoa), *fonua* (Tonga) and *fenua* (Maohi Nui) [and one could add *whenua* in New Zealand Maori]. The land and the sea are indivisible, they form one reality... The fact that the land and the sea are related to the mother’s womb explains why Pacific people have strong and deep attachment to both (Tuwera 1989: 10).

Perhaps it was intuitive imagination which drew the association to the name *SeaChanges* but it is clearly one which invites and will continue to invite feminist exploration into the future beyond the possibilities of this paper.

As I explored the title of the paper further, I became conscious personally that *seachanges living* as a result of my own move across the Tasman Sea in January 2003, to live and work in Auckland in Aotearoa New Zealand. One of my first awarenesses of difference was in relation to the land itself. I knew in my body that the land was different, that Aotearoa was a much younger land than the ancient land of my birth, Australia. I

found this experience offered a significant point of reflection in relation to my own research in which I have developed a multi-dimensional hermeneutic for reading healing women of antiquity which seeks to take account of feminist, postcolonial, and ecological perspectives (Wainwright 2003: 158-161). Attentiveness to body and to space are two of the key categories I am using as I seek to give subjectivity to the healing women of antiquity, situating them not only in human communities but in the broader ecological system of their day.

My awareness of sea changing my experience of body and space, my place in and on/of the land, my attentiveness to the material affirms my hermeneutical development for reading women of antiquity. It also turns attention to a recognition of sea changing living in so many material ways for the women of this region. Within a feminist hermeneutic that begins with experience, women's experience, interpretations of texts and traditions and analyses of women's religious experiences and spiritualities within the region will vary considerably as sea changes living in its multi-dimensionality. It suggests too that feminist analyses cannot be separated from the ecological and there is a rich dimension of possible shared exploration of this in the region.

Returning to my own sea change across the Tasman, I also found very quickly that despite the seeming similarity of dominant Western culture in both Australia and New Zealand, their histories, especially in relation to their indigenous peoples and later arrivals has been very different. The impact of Maori language is one of the most readily recognizable differences which points to the strong emphasis on biculturalism in society generally and the challenge this poses to the recently established University of Auckland's School of Theology in particular which carries as its charter the provision of

high quality bicultural theological education. This together with the text with which I opened the paper are but two indicators which point to the challenge to feminist scholars in the region to integrate postcolonial analyses with feminist approaches in order to begin to address bicultural challenges, an area I will return to later in the paper. My particular experience raises the broader question and challenge which each of our locations evokes, namely is it possible to do feminist theology or studies in religion in this region which is so characterised by its colonial history without seeking to include a postcolonial perspective in our interpretive work? This question together with my previous recognition of the intimate link between feminist and ecological hermeneutics points to the multidimensionality of current feminisms which shapes not only scholarship but also living in this region.

As I am conscious of sea changing my living, I recognise that this is the experience of many women in the Pacific (Tapu-Qilio 2003: 175-179). Women are crossing the Pacific in many directions, sometimes to study theology or religion or to take up other academic pursuits, sometimes shifting permanently and crossing cultures. The diversity of cultures; women, men and children crossing cultures; and the ancient and more contemporary religious traditions associated with these crossings shape the contexts in which women are undertaking theology and studies in religion in this region. Discourses of the sacred are emerging in multiple languages and linguistic traditions in the region and are open to study by women and for women. In this, perhaps there is a challenge for those in the more dominant Western cultures, that we be attentive to the multiplicity of sacred narratives and traditions not only in their antiquity but also in their being re-invoked by women in the region today in multiple ways.

In turning to *seachanging loving*, I must admit that this aspect of the title was intuitive as I prepared for this paper and it added to the alliteration [a little playful addition one might say]. I sensed, however, that it could evoke both cultural and ethical differences that warrant exploration. Reflecting on it personally, however, at the opening of the paper, I found myself having to dwell a little on a family experience which I and my family have revisited often. In December 2002, sea radically changed loving within our family as a seachange took my brother-in-law, Gerard Fitzgerald (Ged), in a rip and onto rocks as he was swimming during a family holiday. The force of the sea made his rescue difficult and he was unconscious when brought from the water and died two days later. Sea changed loving profoundly for my sister, Loretto and my two nephews, Brendan and Ciaran and my niece, Kate, and for all the extended family. It also invited reflection on our intimate connection as human community with our other-than-human environment. Ged himself would be raising questions about the interconnection between life and death and the extraordinary environment in which we live as human community intimately interconnected with the other-than-human were he still with us, as he was asking these questions prior to his death. I pondered these questions with him recently as I sat on the rocky headland and watched a huge sea pound on the rocks at Stradbroke Island and marveled that he was not more battered in body by the time he was able to be rescued. There was power in that sea which was far beyond our human power, a power, however, with which we are intimately connected.

Body theology, eco-theology, religion and ecology and emerging spiritualities attentive to our own materiality and the materiality of the ecological system of which we are just a small part were explored by scholars in the region in more detail during the days of the third Women Scholars of Religion and Theology conference in January 2004. Insights

from these presentations together with my own personal experience and reflection surprised me once again into a new appreciation of the early feminist claim that the personal is political and that each of us carry with us the many ways in which sea changes land and living and loving.

As Women Scholars, for whom *SeaChanges* entitles the ejournal established by the association *Women Scholars of Religion and Theology* just four years ago, the sea and its changes to land, to human living and human loving in community not only with one another but with the Earth and in this region points to perhaps one of the significant developments in the association since its inception in 1992, just over ten years ago. A highly nuanced and multi-dimensional understanding of women and feminism[s] to include the post-feminist, postcolonial, ecological and other perspectives has developed. Let me turn now to trace some of the changes in the association in just over ten years and how these have been associated with some of the changing landscapes or seascapes within members' disciplines which will be hinted at along the way. I also hope to raise some questions about what the future might entail as women scholars of the region take account of their stories and locations ecologically, geographically and academically.

Changing Landscapes/Changing Seascapes

In order to situate these changes, it may be appropriate here to return to the origins of the Women Scholars of Religion and Theology association and to tell something of its story so that this story is not lost as many women's stories have been lost throughout history. Its origin could be situated in the birthpangs of women's isolation as emerging scholars in the South Pacific region and their desire for networking. At an international theological gathering, *Christ and Culture*, held in Dunedin in 1991, a number of women scholars

gathered. These were women teaching in Theological Colleges in the region. They numbered twenty-three in all if my list is correct: 13 from New Zealand, 9 from Australia and one woman from Fiji and they tentatively named themselves South Pacific Association of Women Teaching in Theological Colleges. Wishing to continue their association, they planned to network further with other women in the region not present at the *Christ and Culture* gathering. This was made possible as the Society of Biblical Literature was holding an international meeting in Melbourne in July 1992.

On the day prior to the opening of the Society of Biblical Literature meeting, 11 July 1992, forty-one women gathered at Queens College, Melbourne, and 15 sent apologies [seven of the women had been at the Dunedin conference (1991) and at least three attended the 2004 conference]. Because of location, Australians this time numbered 35, New Zealanders 4 and two Tongan women who were studying in Australia were present. This meeting provided an opportunity for these women scholars to meet, to share with one another their areas of research, to discuss professional support and to determine whether they wished to formalise the establishment of a professional association. Women scholars networking was clearly a key principle and the significant issues identified were as follows:

- Feminist Critique of Scripture
- Theology
- Theological Reflection or doing Theology
- Theology and Cultural Imperialism
- Church History
- Philosophical/Theological/Feminist Hermeneutics and its relation to Feminist Theory

- Ritual/Spirituality

It quickly emerged that each woman's area of interest or of research activity crossed a number of these issues and that the best way to facilitate networking would be the compilation of a Directory that would give contact details and focus areas for each scholar. A number of contact people were named in different locations and a small executive—Pamela Foulkes, Angela Coco and Elaine Wainwright—were appointed to midwife the birth process for this fledgling association.

Just exactly when the association was named is not evident from the data available to me at present but it did result from a consultation process by post subsequent to the 1992 meeting and initiated on 11 November 1992. The consultation sought details for the directory and suggestions for an association name. Correspondence undated but early in 1993, gives the number of members as 70 and announces the name of the association as *Women Scholars of Religion and Theology* [abbreviation WSRT]. There was no formal constitution developed for the association. The executive was entrusted with maintenance of the directory and collection of a small subscription for this purpose. It was also proposed that it would be desirable to have an association conference at an appropriate but undesignated future date. What this new association was to become was left to an organic process. Its name, however, indicates that it was to be a professional association to support women scholars of religion and theology in the Pacific, Oceania or South-East Asian region [with no designated boundaries established to define the region with any exactitude which has proven to be a prophetic insight – it is the sea which unites members from India to the Philippines, Tonga, Samoa, Fiji, Indonesia, Aotearoa and Australia just as it changes and highlights differences]. Time and tide have changed the

association over the subsequent 10 – 11 years since its birth. Glancing toward the future suggests that it may be time to develop a constitution or charter that might hold something of the vision which has developed among members and which might carry key moments of the story. The way the association does this and the outcome may need to reflect who the members are, where they are and how they desire to be. This may be a task to be undertaken during the next three years.

Returning to the story, the multidimensional nature of the commitments of the executive of WSRT meant that the “appropriate” and indeed possible time for the first conference of the association was not until January 1998, approximately five years after the inception of the association. It was, however, worth the wait as approximately 140 participants gathered in Brisbane from 8 – 10 January 1998. They came from England, India and the Philippines, Tonga, Fiji, and Papua New Guinea, Aotearoa New Zealand and Australia. The conference was characterised by a sharing of regional scholarship and was entitled “Gathering the Threads”, a motif which resonates with Weavers, the women’s subcommittee of the South Pacific Association of Theological Schools (SPATS) organization. A significant moment in the development of the association was the election at the initial conference of a new executive—Di Strevens, Pat Lythe, Janet Turpie Johnstone and Fran Gray—more representative of some of the diversity of the association both in terms of ethnicity and locality. One of their major tasks was to establish a pattern for the association conference and so in January 2001, 3 years after the inaugural conference, the second, “Sharing the Baskets of Knowledge”, was held in Auckland, New Zealand.

Sea changes living and the bicultural aspect of the New Zealand location already

highlighted earlier in this paper was very visible in this conference. The first words encountered on the conference brochure were *Te Hui Rangahau Whakapono o te Hunga Wananga Wahine: Women Scholars of Religion and Theology Conference*. The baskets or *kete* were explained in terms of Maori cultural/religious traditions:

In the time when the world was devoid of superior forms of knowledge *Tane* journeyed to *tetoi o nga rangi*, the uppermost of the heavens and obtained the three baskets of knowledge.

- *Te kete Aronui* the basket containing all knowledge pertaining to good, all things humane concerning welfare.
- *Te kete Tuatea* the basket containing knowledge of all evil pertaining to people, to natural phenomena, to all kingdoms of nature
- *Te kere Tuauri* the basket containing all knowledge of ritual acts and formulae.

The symbol of the baskets has been chosen for this *hui* in acknowledgement of the reality that women's experience in theology and religion encompasses aspects from each of these *kete*. In this gathering an invitation is extended to women scholars to share the contents of their *kete* (Sharing the Baskets of Knowledge Registration Brochure 2001).

This shift highlights one of the significant changes in the region since the inception of the association. Women across the Pacific have been undertaking an exploration and critique of their cultures and a dialogue with their religious and theological traditions in a variety of ways and this is being published, made available across the region. Two examples are the EATWOT consultation *Pacific Women and Theology*, a small booklet published after a 1994 consultation, and *Weaving Women and Theology*, a second consultation of

Weavers, the women's subcommittee of the South Pacific Association of Theological Schools published in Volume 15, 1996 of *The Pacific Journal of Theology*, edited by Lisa Meo. In this second publication, Céline Hoiore says that "[w]e need to learn about the social, political and church structures that restrict women, and to know how they have come about and how to take steps in order to be in solidarity with others who work for change" (1996: 43).

In the years subsequent to the Auckland conference of WSRT, two important publications have emerged: *Tonga—Women and Theological Impact* and *Weavings: Women doing Theology in Oceania*. In the latter, for instance, M'aleta Kutimeni Tenten demonstrates how the very positive appreciation of the *katekateka* ritual or initiation rite for young girls experiencing first menstruation can shape a positive appreciation of women's ordination in the Kirabati church (2003: 32-42). Céline Hoiore's analysis of the burying of the *pu femua* or placenta in the family's land points to the way this establishes long-lasting relationship with land and she demonstrates that if sea changes land profoundly, dislocating family and land, that the "unbreakable link will compel the family to come back to the land despite all the voyages they may have to undertake to do so" (2003: 43). Hoiore develops this tradition in relation to Maohi Nui cultural experience but indicates that there are similar traditions in other Polynesian societies. At the 1998 *Gathering the Threads* Conference, Kath McPhillips undertook a feminist post-colonial reading of menstruation rites using the theories of Claudia Serematakis and Melissa Raphael in order to "argue that a genealogy of sacred space needs to historicise the account of the sacred/profane which often operates as an ontological given if menstruation is to be re-figured into new metaphors around blood, body, sacrality and space." (McPhillips 1998: 7). Sea changes the cultural experiences of these women scholars located in different

places across the Pacific. Also, the multiple ways in which women analyse those experiences and create sacred narratives differ across the region. The question arises, however, what interesting new theology and religious studies might emerge if some of these explorations could be brought into dialogue such as those of M'aleta Kutimeni Tenten and Kath McPhillips? This question struck me again recently as I read a Tongan woman's exploration of the Daughter of Zion metaphor from the Hebrew Bible² conscious also of Kath Rushton's exploration of this metaphor for an interpretation of Johannine Christology in her doctoral dissertation (2000). What might emerge if the association Women Scholars of Religion and Theology could facilitate dialogue between such scholars across cultures?

The text above from the abstract of Kath McPhillips' 1998 paper demonstrates that in the period from the inception of the association to the profoundly culturally grounded New Zealand conference and on to today, highly nuanced hermeneutical and theoretical perspectives have been and are being developed by some women in the region, predominantly those of Western origins and traditions. Others are developing different theoretical and methodological approaches. Feminist perspectives are being challenged and nuanced by postcolonialism. This brings with it an attentiveness to hybridity and the multiple languages [both actual and metaphorical] which colonised women have had to learn and the multiple dimensionality of their work for feminist transformation among their colonised people. This attentiveness also has an inherent challenge. Narayan and Mohanty are both cited in Clarke and Olesen as urging:

Western feminists and others (ought) not to universalize or essentialize non-Western nation-states and cultures. Universalizing and essentializing approaches are as suspect here as they are vis-à-vis gender or race. In (post)

² This paper is not yet a public document and hence cannot be cited here.

colonial contexts, both are forms of recolonization. Instead, acknowledging heterogeneities, histories and cultural contestations counters hegemonic practices of old imperialisms and new globalizations, and refutes sexist practices of old and new nationalisms (1999: 13).

This will mean that feminism or feminisms within the region cannot be monolithic but that there will be a blurring of boundaries. It also calls for a dialogue. Paulla Tsing Ebron and Anna Lowenhaupt warn, however, of the challenges to this dialogue that particularities of communities of analysis can cause:

[T]here is very little dialogue between one marginalized position and any other. We build alliances with a rhetoric of solidarity, but we have few tools with which to create critical and reflexive conversations that recognize our differences as well as our common stakes. When intellectual and political tensions arise, advocates of each marginal group remain insensitive to the challenges of others (1995: 390)

They go on to say that their essay “enters this gap to begin the process of building theoretical tools for dialogue. As ‘women writing culture,’ we are particularly concerned to move beyond understandings of culture that have confined women inside cultural communities.” (1995: 390). Perhaps one of the greatest challenges to our association is the dialogue that recognises hybridity in relation to cultures that constitute this region, to diversities and differences in methodologies for the study of those cultures and their religious and theological traditions. Seachanges invite us into the borderland spaces which for us in this region may, in fact, be seascapes rather than landscapes or they may be foreshores. Gloria Anzaldúa articulates this invitation evocatively:

...at some point, on our way to a new consciousness, we will have to leave the opposite bank, the split between the two mortal combatants somewhat

healed so that we are on both shores at once, and at once see through the serpent and the eagle eyes (1987: 78).

This is a point along the association's journey at which we have not yet arrived but toward which we strain. How can we as women in theology and studies in religion in this region develop such a dialogue that is truly postcolonial and ensure that the journal and the association reflect this challenge? How can we set up the structures which may enable the dialogue?

One of the vehicles for such dialogue is the ejournal *SeaChanges* which was launched at the 2001 Auckland conference and which is now in its fourth edition [Accessed at <http://www.wsrt.com.au/seachanges/index.shtml>]. It seeks to provide a forum for the publication of regional feminist theology and studies in religion. It is peer reviewed and registered for academic performance purposes. This is a significant achievement of the association beyond original hopes and dreams. The journal has a philosophy developed by its original editorial committee:

SeaChanges is...fully peer-reviewed and provides a medium for promoting the growing volume of scholarship undertaken by women in the area of religion and theology. The journal also aims to further the engagement of religion and theology with women's issues.

Articles published in *SeaChanges* will traverse boundaries between academic disciplines and cultures both within countries of the region and across national boundaries. They will be written in accessible style and engage insightfully and innovatively with theory and praxis. The diversity and difference represented in the association's membership and scholarship will

be reflected in each issue of the journal.

(<http://www.wsrt.com.au/seachanges/philosophy.shtml>).

It is in relation to the journal, however, that some of the most significant seachanges are possible. Discourse available for dialogue and critique by peers either by way of print or electronic media has become the mode for women scholars as well as for men. This is true also for feminist scholars despite some attempts to move some of the boundaries into the creative rearticulations of traditions and text. The journal, therefore, represents an achievement of the aspirations of some of the women who gathered initially and envisaged Women Scholars of Religion and Theology. It provides women with another forum for the publication of material that may not be so readily accepted into regional journals like *Pacifica*, *Review*, *Australasian Catholic Record*, *Colloquium* and others more specific to particular disciplines.

Regionally, however, print (and now electronic media) is not the most accessible or the most natural medium of communication even though there have been significant achievements in this regard, making Pacific women's theology available to a much wider reading public. Céline Hoiore said, in her panel presentation on women in theological education to the second consultation organised by Weavers, that "we do not like to write. We are still people of oral traditions, so writing is a big challenge for us today" (1996: 44.). Oral tradition is a powerful medium among all the indigenous peoples of this region and it will continue and grow strong but indigenous women are also seeking a public voice and using the written medium as well. The Weavers Writer's Workshop in April 2001 which resulted in the 2003 publication of *Weavings Women Doing Theology in Oceania* may provide a model or an indicator of ways in which Women Scholars of

Religion and Theology as an association and/or in conjunction with other associations of women like Weavers may be able to support women's theological and religious writings across all groups of women in the region. Local writing workshops could be one possibility. A mentoring arm to the editorial board of *SeaChanges* could be another to provide the personal support in developing articles submitted for publication from the submission to the publication stage where this would facilitate the publication of a wider group of women's scholarship in the region. This will not only provide a vehicle for the publication of a wide range of women's theology and religious studies but also enhance the regional nature of the journal.

In order to facilitate dialogue around some of the areas of challenge to women scholars within the Pacific region, it may be possible to use the journal as one point of dialogue. A section like the Roundtable in the *Journal for the Feminist Study of Religion* may provide a place to hear different voices addressing questions and issues of concern to women in the region. The integration of the critical and the creative articulations and re-articulations of women's ritual and spiritual traditions may be another area for consideration as the association explores the future of the journal *SeaChanges*. For many women in the region for whom the discursive is not their primary mode of theologizing or creating religious tradition, an electronic journal which allows for more creative articulations than print media may be a very important vehicle. At a recent gathering of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People in Brisbane called *Gathering the Voices*, participants theologised in art. Joan Hendriks who was a participant at the 1998 and 2004 conferences of the association and member of the organizing committee in 1998 reflects on her artwork produced at *Gathering the Voices*:

Sunset across the waters of Quandamooka is a special time for prayerful

reflection. The beauty of the sun gently sneaking away to continue nourishing life elsewhere is a wonder of God's creation....Being in touch with Creator Spirit at this special time of the day is only one means of living relationships with Creator God through creation (Hendricks 2002: 41-42).

Many would also be familiar with Margaret Ackland's painting, *A Place at the Table*, emerging from the Last Supper Project of the Uniting Church of Australia's National Commission on Women and Men (Fisher and Wood 1993) and the theologising associated with it. Art and women's art was also a very significant feature of the 2004 conference.

Musicians and artists who theologise by way of their artforms and those creating new rituals may need to participate with the association as its members explore ways of giving expression to the richness of disciplines in the *SeaChanges* journal beyond the purely discursive. This is a challenge that is not new to feminists but one which the association has not yet fully negotiated and which finds its particular nuances in this region.

The third conference of the Association, *Peaceworks*, just eleven years after the inception of the association, was characterised by women critically reflecting on inherited religious and theological traditions, creating sacred discourse and shaping feminist spiritualities into the future. Regional networking of women scholars of religion and theology was still a key focus of the third conference. The association's networking is, however, more established with a website, directory and ejournal. This raises the question as to whether it is time for establishing more formal relationships with other associations of women in the region such as the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologian's women's network, Weavers, and the Center for Feminist Theology and Ministry in Japan to name

but three. Such networking may be a way of ensuring that the association, Women Scholars of Religion and Theology, becomes more regional as well as participating in the fullest development of women's theology and religious studies in the region. Also, maintaining the links which many members have with the Feminist Liberation Network established by Mary Hunt and Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza and linked to the American Academy of Religion and Society of Biblical Literature annual meeting ensures that we are participating in the broader network of women scholars. Such networking may also attract women from other contexts to our regional conferences to extend our dialogue.

Looking to our future would indicate that it may also be a time for more focused networking among particular groups of women that could be a little more formally and officially supported by an association like Women Scholars of Religion and Theology. Kath McPhillips' recent study of feminist theological and religious studies education in Australia has indicated a need for networking among postgraduate students, especially at the doctoral level (2003). Exploration of ways this might be able to be established and perhaps extended across the Pacific could strengthen the identity of the association. Similarly McPhillips' study indicated the need for a directory of both supervisors and examiners for feminist postgraduate students in the region (2003: 31), a task which could also be supported by Women Scholars of Religion and Theology. Another networking need that came to my attention recently was that expressed by some Catholic women studying theology in the New Zealand context. To gather as networking members of Women Scholars of Religion and Theology can give legitimacy to a group both in terms of its own identity and also in the eyes of observers. This may work similarly for Linda Papuni's proposal in relation to Maori women's theologising and exploring the Marae as context. Gathering as Women Scholars of Religion and Theology can give identity and

purpose from which new possibilities may emerge. Such gatherings can certainly happen without any formal structures. There may, however, be ways in which members can claim their assemblies under the name of the association should they need to do so. This may be able to be linked to the development of a constitution or it may be just an informal arrangement discussed at annual general meetings, but it represents an important new stage for the association which may enable it to be a more significant support structure for the needs of women scholar's networking in the region into the twenty-first century.

Conclusion

The journey of the association has seen many landscapes and seascapes and members have been changed as they have developed organically from the initial struggles to birth an established network. During this time, sea has changed land and living and loving as new peoples have entered the region from places like Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Palestine, and living and loving has been challenged and changed as have the lives of those women, men and children. The world to which the region is organically linked has also changed during these years and its very sustainability politically, economically, culturally and ecologically challenges our theologising and our studies of religions in this region.

As women scholars of religion and theology in this region none of these seachanges can fail to touch us and impact on our scholarship. In conclusion, I wish to evoke some of the women of seachanges in the religious and theological traditions which characterise this region and which are carried in the spirits of the women of this region.

Tui Cardigan who was a recent member of the editorial board of *Seachanges* evokes “the

power/prestige of *wahine* [maori which] comes from her link with *Atua* as the Source of her very being, from *tipuna* [ancestors] by virtue of her inherited line of descent and from *whenua* through *Hine-ahu-one* the first human formed from the sands of *Papatuanuku*/the earth mother” (2). Amy Chambers points to wisdom in a Fijian context being associated with the midwife evoking Shiprah and Puah, those wise women of the Hebrew Bible who stand as the instigators of an extraordinary sea change which has become a paradigm in both the Jewish and Christian traditions. They lead me to evoke the midwives of antiquity and of history, women who were healers and who nurtured and supported life and growth. We have so little of their stories, of their lives, but I saw recently a *lekythos* [funerary vase] honouring the midwife Theophanate and was struck by the endurance of materiality. These *lekythoi* survive to keep the story of healing women, of birthing women.

During the days of the third conference of Women Scholars of Religion and Theology, members were attentive to materiality, they shaped and shared sacred discourse, they enacted rituals, uncovered spiritualities, did theology. The spirits and powers of the region were with them as were the women of spirit who preceded them across the land and seascapes of the region’s history. They shaped participants as women of transformative healing, women shaping the association of Women Scholars of Religion and Theology in the region in response to the many challenges which their stories evoked.

Sea does change land and living and loving. The third conference of Women Scholars of Religion and Theology, *Peaceworks*, and the ongoing work of the association and its publication of this edition of the journal *SeaChanges* is witness to this.

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