

**LOOKING AT GOD'S IMAGE AND LIKENESS  
THROUGH THE CULTURAL LENS OF  
*FAKAOLIA* TO RE-IMAGE THE WOMAN AS  
A THEOLOGICAL RESPONSE TO DOMESTIC  
VIOLENCE IN VANUATU**

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by

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## ABSTRACT

The urge to research and find a theological approach to address domestic violence arose out of workshops, organized by the Uniting World and PTC in 2018 and 2019 and held in Fiji. Students had the opportunity to participate. The stories and experiences shared opened my eyes to its alarming reality especially, in Vanuatu.

Violence happens in all forms, from physical, verbal to sexual abuse. Moreover, many of our women think that abuse in the home or family life is normal because it is part of being obedient in cultural and Christian tradition. It is not! Since Vanuatu is diverse in culture and language, I am using Mele as my focal point to argue that a Ni-Van woman (or girl) is equal to the man (or boy) and is the “image” and “likeness” of God.

My limited contribution to this broad topic comes from the conviction that Ni-Vanuatu women and girls have the right to be happy, free from emotional and verbal abuse, physical and sexual violence. They should live life to its fullness free, happy and safe from violence. Whatever their size, look, age, or experiences from life, they have are of worth and value to God, their home, community and nation.


Fakaolia employed as a cultural concept relating to the *Imago Dei*, and used as a theological approach to addressing domestic violence. The why, what, where, when and how of the violence will be addressed in the thesis. What is important is that every human being is the image and likeness of God. More so, for the woman to understand that she is special, honoured, valued, created equal with the man by God alone. She is created as a free being, to think, speak and do all for the glory of God and live well (John 10:10).

## DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that this thesis, which is 33,346 words in length (excluding the bibliography and front matter) has been written by me, that it is the result of work carried out by me, and that it has not been submitted either in whole or in part, in any previous written work for an academic award at this or any other academic institution.

I also declare that this thesis has not used any material, heard or read, without academically appropriate acknowledgment of the source.

Name: Leinamau Seru

Signed: 

Date: 18<sup>th</sup> September 2019

## DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this project to my family who have always supported me in prayers and given numerous other support. My brother, Samuel Seru and his wife and my sister, Amy Cuong and my nephews and niece and all my immediate and extended family, especially Matarau *Taravaki* and *Matautaava*.

Life goes on despite challenges and sorrows. During the writing of this thesis, I lost my mum, on the 12<sup>th</sup> of August 2019. She was always there for me - supporting, praying encouraging and cheering me up at times when I needed it. Your generosity knew no bounds and your smile lightened up the day no matter how dark the clouds. “*Akoe fei jietata marie, manaturaga neau nomoa sai. Faf'tai gaia t'lekororaga go mikuraraga marie, migoro go milotuga marie. Mantua akoe sa taulake kutapa rekina akoe. T'noigoa masu fei tesamaniraga!*” (Late Retired Elder Matautaava (1940 – 2019)

Also to Late Elder Malakauamata of the Presbyterian Church of Imere Session, who was at the same time, Chief of Mele Village and known as Teriki Masaai (1961 – 2017). You were a role model, always humble, loving, kind and a peacemaker of the family, church and community. “*Akoe fei Teriki maomao.*”

I would also like to dedicate this project to all those working as advocates and co-workers to stop Domestic Violence in Vanuatu and Oceania, also to the victims and the survivors. God bless you all.

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*The Lord bless you and keep you*

*The Lord make His face to shine upon you and be gracious to you*

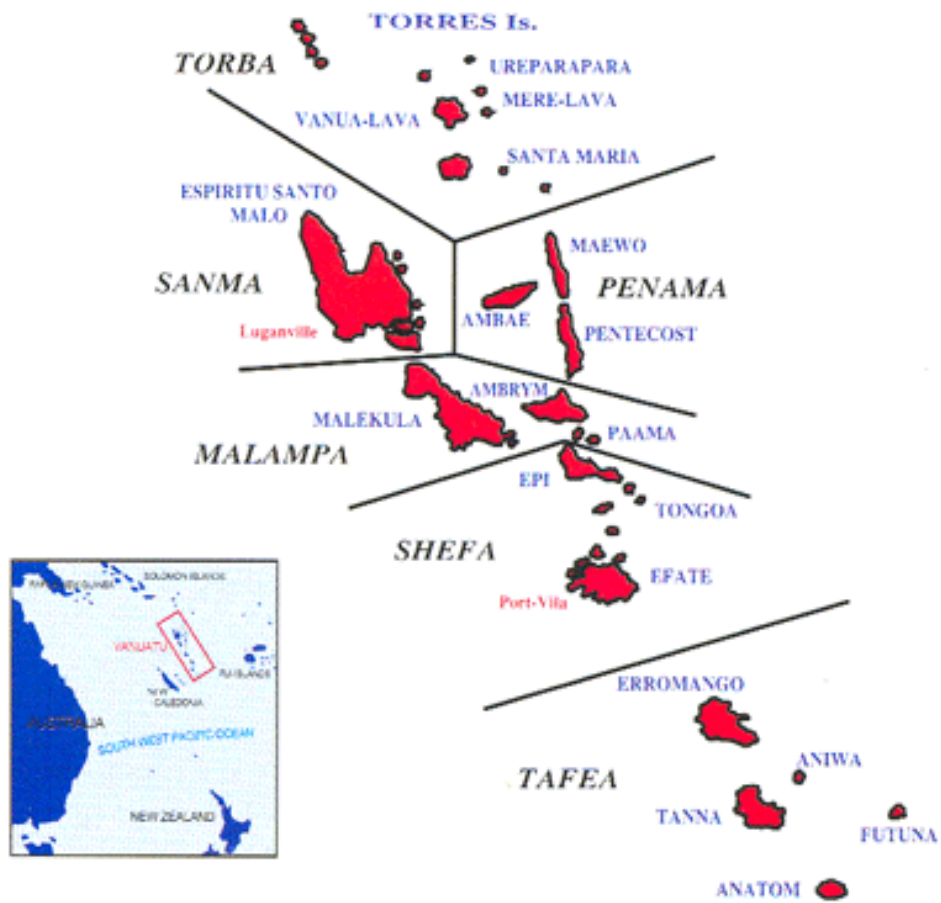
*The Lord lift up His countenance upon you*

*And give you peace*

*(Numbers 6:24-26)*

## List of Illustrations

This is a Map of Vanuatu with the six provinces, Torba, Sanma, Malampa, Shefa and Tafea marked out. Mele, which is on the island of Efate, is in the Shefa Province.



This is the Island of Efate within the Shefa Province in Vanuatu. Port Vila, Vanuatu's capital is on Efate and so is the Village of Mele, which is about fifteen minutes' drive from Port Vila.



## List of Abbreviation

CSO	-	Civil Society Organizations
Ni-Van	-	Ni-Vanuatu
NRSV	-	New Revised Standard Version
PCV	-	The Presbyterian Church of Vanuatu
PMH	-	Paton Memorial Hospital
PWMU	-	Presbyterian Women's Missionary Union
SHEFA Province	-	Shepherd Group of Islands, Epi and Efate

## Introduction

There is not enough understanding of what it means as male and female in the image of God. My interest in domestic violence is not without reason, but the alarming statistics (UNICEF 2015, 4) has pushed me in this direction to find a theological understanding through our cultural and communal understanding of what the word Image means. Vanuatu is male-dominated and many times, women find themselves at the mercy of their male counterpart in domestic violence, as in fights, arguments, verbal and sexual abuse that arise, which sometimes end fatally.

Yet, Vanuatu (2006) in its preamble has called itself a Christian country with cultural values that seek the good and respect of the other. The biblical concept of God creating human beings in God's image applies to both men and women of today's context. In Vanuatu, it is assume that the man is the full image and not the woman. However, life is relational and like God, humans cannot live without other humans and the environment, and certainly not without God, for life comes from God and kept by God. If humans are relational and pass on the image of God from generation to generation, then it is also cultural thus introducing in this thesis, *Fakaolia*.

The word *Fakaolia* means image in Mele language. *Faka* means *Act* and *Olia* means *Likeness*. It could easily be said that a son is the *Fakaolia*<sup>1</sup> of his father or a daughter her mother. It could also mean having the same likeness or the characteristics of some other person within the family. In our culture, the features and characteristics of someone are often named before one is even born thus the name predisposes what the image ought to be. *Fakaolia* is the word used within a family of comparing the father to son or mother to daughter or vice versa thus making it possible to relate to this thesis within a family

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<sup>1</sup>*Fakaolia* – is the Mele translation for 'image' but it also connotes an 'acting' image.

context or relationship. Though the father is often the head of the home, it is with respect that he holds his wife and his children close to his heart, providing and caring for them. Mother on her part, is respectful and humble to obey the husband in supporting him in the way that brings out the best and keeps him healthy to provide for his home. The children are to be obedient, kind and respectful of their elders, in a way that shows respect and honour in all that they do. Fakaolia thrives on this line, keeping the image of the older version of the family in respect and love.

Fakaolia as image is gender neutral in my culture, thus used as a lens to re-birth the biblical perspective of God's image of whether domestic violence is part of God's character. It is with care that I explore Fakaolia in my context with the theological perspective of humans being made in God's likeness and image as God desired it to be (Genesis 1:26). This thesis views domestic violence as a sin because it deny God's image in women and fashions God in a particular patriarchal image and not the reverse where men and women are both made in God's image.

Most of the statistics used come from the government, who runs awareness through NGO's through the Women's Desk (UNICEF 2015, 19-21). However, it is the Church,<sup>2</sup> who has the better network and structure from the grass root people up to the top and vice versa. The statistics, therefore, put the Church in an awkward position as to why its people, particularly women and children face abuse and oppression while the Church stands idle.

However, there are limits to this thesis because it would not do justice to Vanuatu's diversity of languages and cultures. However, it is my intention to explore any positive possibility that could bridge the gap between the church and culture to reach a common

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<sup>2</sup> The Presbyterian Church of Vanuatu has one of the best structures and networks in Vanuatu, which reaches down to the community or grass root level, and vice versa. The structure is on Appendix 1 on page 107.

understanding for a good, safe and free environment for men, women and children in the community through Fakaolia, which should benefit Vanuatu for a better future.

My research questions rotate around thoughts such as ‘does the theology of God’s image have a bearing on domestic violence, and its alarming increase?’ The first chapter deals with the research problem, which is domestic violence and the need to re-image God. What is domestic violence in the Vanuatu context, within the family, church and community and how does the Image of God relate to this? Fakaolia is introduced as the lens for the theological cultural approach of the *Imago Dei*.

Chapter two deals more with the term *Imago Dei* or the image of God in re-reading Genesis 1:26 using Fakaolia as a hermeneutical lens and how it could bring its knowledge and tradition into the mat of understanding that humans (women and men) are made in the image of God in a positive way, however its disadvantages are also discussed. Chapter Three deals with the image of women, and brings to the fore why it is assumed sinful. The cultural role of naming, and family relationships bring out the image of women as important. Their relation to the land and economics play an important role in the society. However, drawbacks to the language of dominion and inequality happens which could stem from the (mis)interpretation of culture, the bible or both?

Chapter Four looks for a theological alternative or a way forward for children, women and men in light of this issue. It re-looks at culture and the church, roles played within it and how it could help to pave the way forward in order to decrease the statistics of domestic violence. Could an alternative image by women and men in God’s Fakaolia be re-imaged?

## **Chapter 1**

# **Domestic Violence and the Need to Re-Image the Ni-Vanuatu Woman**

A church elder came forward with excitement and enthusiasm to share his new discovery. He approached a small group of people and exclaimed! “I just found out a new thing today in our Bible study. I discovered that women are also created in God’s image!” This church elder belonged to a church in one of the remote small islands in the Pacific, where the Pacific Theological College was conducting a Summer school for church leaders (Ilisapeci Meo 2003, 150). This is a common story for some of our churches in the Pacific, especially if our culture also upholds the man as the better image, stronger and wiser human. Many events happening around the life within a community are ruled and run by men (which is a big responsibility), but it is often done to ensure that things run smoothly in the community and that decisions made are being carried out and the rules kept.

This chapter focuses on domestic violence and its reality around Vanuatu. Why the alarming statistics? Is the female image not important in the Ni-Vanuatu context within the community and the church? In trying to find a theological approach to address this issue, the cultural concept of ‘Fakaolia’ or ‘Image’ will be introduced and used throughout the thesis.



## 1.1. The Happiest Place on Earth?

Vanuatu<sup>1</sup>, a Melanesian nation of about 83 islands (of which 12 to 13 are inhabited) has a population of about 350,000 people who speak about 110 different dialects. England and France colonized Vanuatu in the 1900's. On 30 July 1980, when the British and French flags were lowered, Vanuatu (New Hebrides) became independent. However, the colonizers' laws, language, structures, values and systems remained with us. After independence, we are Ni-Vanuatu but we are neither Anglophone nor Francophone (Rakau 2010, 62). However, to communicate, Bislama is the common language used throughout the islands.

In 2006, the UK based New Economics Foundation published 'The Happy Planet Index: an index of human well-being and environmental impact,' in which countries were ranked in relation to three indicators of well-being: Life Satisfaction, life expectancy, and ecological footprint. According to this criteria, Vanuatu was declared to be the 'Happiest Country in the World' (2010, 2, 3). Within this report, surveys of domestic violence and the relationship between men and women was portrayed positively (2010, 5).

However, a closer look at the national statistics according to the Vanuatu Women's Centre (VWC), over 60% of women experience physical or sexual violence by their husband/partner in their lifetime (Ernst 2017, 442, 443). This does not justify Vanuatu as 'the happiest' country on earth. The Vanuatu Women's crisis Centre is doing all it can to address this issue with the help of the Police Department. Moreover, the government has passed laws to help women or men concerning violence, yet, the statistics remain high. Since most of the cases reported to the police are by female victims, this draws us to the probable conclusion that women are less of the image of God, thus not often protected when arguments or fights happen. The churches have discussed the issue yet, no work

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<sup>1</sup> The map of Vanuatu divided into its six provinces is on the Illustration page xii.

has been done on the pulpit, congregation and grass root level, to help the people recognize what domestic violence is – a crime and sin.

## **1.2. The definition of Domestic Violence**

The word domestic according to the Oxford Dictionary (Hornsby 2000, 373) means liking and enjoying home life. Violence on the other hand, means behaviour that is violent with the intention to hurt or kill someone. So domestic violence is violent acts or threats between family members in a home or families. It could be verbal abuse, sexual harassment, fighting, manipulating, oppressing financially, mentally and physically. It happens to the rich, the poor, the young or old and to the male or female. It can happen to anyone at any place and at any time. Since it is domestic, most of the time the victim and perpetrator know each other.

On a report for Samoan communities in New Zealand concerning ‘Christian Faith and Family Violence,’ Dr Mercy Ah Siu-Maliko (2016, 1) emphasized that “Family violence is an issue for everyone. It is a global challenge present in every society and every community.” Not only is the victim victimized, any family member witnessing the violence would be prone to psychological and emotional impact in their lives. She states also that continuous violence leads to self-doubt, low self-esteem and self-blame which sometimes end up in suicide. This portrays an image of depression and challenge for any family to live, survive and grow up in.

Violence happens and one main reason that contributes to this is “the societies of the Pacific Islands are all, in varying degrees, patriarchal. This structure has been further strengthened and encouraged by Christianity, which has further legitimized the oppression of women” (Ilisapeci Meo 2003, 151). This makes women easy targets for violence because their being second best or inferior to men in the common assumption.

In Mele<sup>2</sup> language, there is no word for domestic violence, but there is a word for ongoing violence, which is *sigipiri*. *Sigi* means to be hostile and opposed and *piri* means ongoing. The violence that comes from *sigipiri* could happen to anyone at any place. However, rising statistics show a more ‘happenings behind closed doors’ or within the home, which is often termed as a private family matter (Meo 2003, 152).

### **1.2.1. The Vanuatu Women’s Centre**

In 2012, the Vanuatu Women’s Centre released a pamphlet<sup>3</sup> showing the levels of violence in the six provinces of Vanuatu from the North to South. Among the statistics for violence against women, emotional abuse was high at 80% from the Malampa Province<sup>4</sup> including physical abuse at 69% and sexual abuse was higher in the Sanma Province<sup>5</sup> at 60%. For the overall percentage: emotional violence stood at 68%, physical violence at 51% and sexual violence at 44%. Surprisingly, the lowest statistics come from Shefa Province<sup>6</sup> where Port Vila, our capital town is. The low figures from the Shefa Province imply that there is work done in the communities and homes, but the violence is ongoing.

However, Port Vila, itself, has a high statistic with emotional abuse at 57%, physical violence at 39% and sexual abuse at 28%. Our second town, Luganville on Santo, has a slighter higher statistic. When compared to the urban areas, the statistics are higher in the rural settings. Statistics show there are at least, two women who suffer from violence every week, and more than one woman ends up at the hospital. Unfortunately, many of

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<sup>2</sup> Mele is a village on the South-west part of the island Efate, map on illustration page xi.

<sup>3</sup> Heading of the Pamphlet is ‘*Wanem yu mas save abaot Vaelens Agensem ol Woman*’ produced in 2012 by the Vanuatu Women’s Centre and is in Appendix 110, and the statistic levels in page 111.

<sup>4</sup> Malampa Province consists of Malekula (the second largest island in Vanuatu, Ambrym and Paama).

<sup>5</sup> Sanma Province has the largest island in Vanuatu, Santo and Malo, an offshore island close to it.

<sup>6</sup> Shefa Province consists of Efate, offshore islands, Epi and the Shepherd Group islands.

these women never report to the police, chief or pastor, due to fear and shame. About 43% of the women face domestic violence, yet 57% will never seek medical help or legal advice (VWC, 2012).

It is a problem when women who are abused, have no safe place to go. Most of our churches have no counselling centres and many women find it hard to share their problems with a male Pastor, Priest or Minister, who holds office in the church. The Vanuatu Women's Centre deals directly with the Police in domestic violence issues and protects the women from being abuse. However, helping them publicly causes the abused women to fear being exposed or force to do something, which they think is not right according to their faith or belief.

Despite working well with the women, VWC however, has a strained relationship with the churches, due to their secular outlook. Yet, looking deeper, it also has this stigma of men in the church versus the women in the VWC. The VWC is independent and can voice out domestic violence as an issue, whereas, the church having the majority of its leadership as male does not address this for its women members.

Doctor Cliff Bird stated in his introduction to the Bible Studies series written in collaboration with the Uniting World on 'Human Dignity and Equality' in 2017, that statistics on violence committed against women, girls and children in the Pacific do not look good at all. They are shocking ... and that goes to show that something is terribly wrong with the human societies and communities, particularly with prevailing and dominant views and understanding of masculinity (2017, 6).

### **1.2.2. A Lone Voice from the Urban Home**

As a female minister, I have often come across women who are suffering but keep silent (not trusting anyone to talk to). They put up a brave and smiling front for all to see (Meo 2003, 151), suppressing all the hurt, blame and pain thinking that it is their fault for

allowing the violence to happen, yet standing tall and strong, for it is their duty to present a happy home image for all to see. Letty Russell (1981, 76) referring to the state of mind of oppressed women, called it the state of being a 'happy slave.' Yet, as Meo (2003, 151) expresses, "a smiling face in a situation of dehumanization does not mean that justice exists within a community.

In 2014, I was working in the Christian Education Office in the Presbyterian Church Head Office, when I got a call from our front desk, asking if it was possible to see someone, who preferably wanted a female Pastor. The woman, who entered was probably in her mid-forties, tall and fair, wearing dark glasses. I had never seen her before and so to put her at ease, I asked her which church she went to, and how could I help her. She said she was Catholic, so I asked her why she wanted to see me, and that was when she took off the sunglasses. I had never seen such a sight close up! My immediate thought was to rush her to the hospital and ring the police. However, in all her talking, she did not expose her husband's name, which told me that this was a confidential visit unknown to her husband.

What I gathered from our talk was that her husband was a good man (had a good position within the government and worked hard). However, he gets crazy sometimes when she does not do things his way. I gently asked her how she felt and she started talking. However, when I suggested that a medical check-up and dressings at the hospital would be good for her, she withdrew and stopped talking. I explained that I would not do anything she did not feel comfortable with, unless she agreed to it.

Sadly she just wanted someone to talk to and pray with, for she believed that it was her Christian duty to stay and support her husband in 'good or bad' times, as promised in their marriage vows 'til death do them part.' The couple had four children. After she left, I wondered why she had come to me. I felt helpless that I had not done anything

worthwhile to help her. However, though I hoped that she would find someone to help her, I also wished that she had the courage to go to the Police, or the Women's Centre to get the help she very much needed.

Paulo Freire (1985, 33) called this pre-liberated state 'domestication' or the 'culture of silence.' Most women accept the decisions made by their male leaders, never questioning but taking for granted that it is for the good of the church. Women in the church live by the decisions made by men and the very few women who participate in decision-making have a minor impact (Meo 2003, 153).

### **1.2.3. The Rural Voice**

On the 26<sup>th</sup> of July this year, 2019, an incident occurred in my village, Mele, which is on the island of Efate, in Vanuatu. On the eve of Vanuatu's 39<sup>th</sup> Independence Anniversary with celebrations going on, a fight occurred between a couple over some small matter, which turned into a big fight. In the midst of the celebration, the fight had gone unnoticed until loud angry shouting caused alarm. By the time people reached the scene, the wife had already suffered serious injuries by the husband. She was still breathing on the way to the hospital, but lost her life after a few hours due to the serious injuries caused.

This type of violence rarely happens, though it causes people to think, talk and reason about it. Family members had observed that her husband had beaten her on more than one occasion and she had ended up in the hospital several times, and once in a coma for some weeks. Yet she had remained with her husband because she did not want to disgrace her family, her children and her husband's family. I am saddened by her loss and the consequences left behind now that she is gone.

It was too late to help her and others like her, gone, because they would never dare lift a voice against the norms of the family, community and church. I am troubled with

thoughts of why the husband did what he did. Did he not have any feelings for his wife in his heart and mind? Did he ever think of the consequences of the actions he had taken? Did he think of the children, his wife's family, or others apart from being selfish and doing the worst thing of all – take a life that meant so much to others. A life to which he thinks he owns and can do whatever he likes with it. That woman who died was my cousin.

The authorities of the community did nothing about it. The police arrested her husband and he is in jail now. Matters become problematic when our Chief<sup>7</sup> (from Mele) judges cases of domestic violence. They judge the case with customary reconciliation in order for the woman to return to her husband or vice versa. However, if the victim refuses and seeks the help of the VWC, the VWC helps the victim go to court and gain direct access to being estranged from the spouse, regardless of what ruling the Chief takes.

The church on the other hand, seems to be on the crossroad. It helps the chief within the community in seeing that people are well physically and spiritually; it also helps the government run workshops and awareness through its network<sup>8</sup> to the grass root level about domestic violence; however, it does not come out independently to defend its victims within the church, namely women. The church as a prophetic voice is silent in addressing social issues such as domestic violence on its doorstep. A lot of work is being done by CSOs and I agree with Manfred Ernst's (2017, 444) statement that the churches lag behind CSOs in being effective.

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<sup>7</sup> We have two Chiefs in Mele - Masaai and Poilapa, who are still in conflict over the Chiefly title.

<sup>8</sup> The church network has a very good structure that can reach the highest meeting place with communication from bottom (home/family) to the congregation, session, presbytery and the general assembly (up) and vice versa. See appendix 1 for the structure.

#### **1.2.4. A Voice in the Church**

However, there are strong women who can stand up and confront their partners by making the wise decision to move to a safer environment. A friend who has been married for twenty-one years had two children. Her husband was a wonderful man who was respectful, loving, kind and an evangelist in the church. One evening she came by wanting to talk. Assuming that it was just another one of our normal talks, I was not prepared for her news. For the last couple of years, her husband had been beating her, but he was always careful in leaving no bare physical marks on her.

However, when she lifted her shirt, her back was all blue/black and one could tell the previous and new marks made. Worried for her safety, I encouraged her to report the matter to the police. She did and got restraining orders after going through a medical check-up, which then allowed her to move out of her husband's home to her parents. Her children were both in high school but she had the support of her parents and siblings. Husband and wife have separated but she is safe with no more beatings and working to support her children. The husband was discipline by the church only after she had reported the matter to the police.

However, these situations do not help the women regain their lives comfortably. The shame, guilt and self-blame makes it hard for them to share their stories especially when they are vulnerable. It is rare to find women who are brave and courageous, stand up to their spouse and seek help or safe space. Children within the family violence often suffer too from self-blame and insecurity which affects their learning in school and life. They become targets for bullying, get into wrong company to feel accepted and generally fail to live an effective and productive life. The wholeness of the family is the image of stability and love that exists through loyalty, sharing and caring for each other. Without this wholeness, relationships shatter and the family image becomes tainted.



### 1.2.5. Man's Freedom, Woman's Commitment

The Vanuatu definition of wellbeing means having a family that consists of a father, mother, and children. In order of importance, there is land, accommodation, gardening and things that can make the family live well, simply and healthily. Growing up in my village with my parents and siblings, Saturdays were the gardening days. When the whale come ashore or was in sight, it was time to plant the yam. The planting of a new garden or harvesting brought togetherness of families, a celebration and the joy of accomplishing hard work of planting or harvesting. The sharing of food and resources within our families do not need much money, for food and land is free. The land is an inheritance from our ancestors and comes with the responsibility of caring and looking after it well for the future generation.

However, due to the large percentage of violence in the rural areas, the focus returns to the patriarchal society. Valerie Saiving Goldstein<sup>9</sup> (1960, 100-101) critiques that the human situation has always been looked at from the male viewpoint, yet often taken for granted that it is from both the male and female perspective by theologians. Man's freedom differentiates him from other creatures, it also enables him to frame his history and form creative cultural activities within the society. However, this freedom has often been the source of his temptation to the sin of wanting to be in control, separated from others or reducing others to mere objects in order to be free, yet, he is blind to his own selfish motives. Man's concept of freedom is ironic because he is not the only human and creature on this earth, he is also dependent on other humans, creatures and the environment to survive and procreate.

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<sup>9</sup> Valerie Saiving Goldstein was a female theologian who lived from 1921- 1992, and who wrote this influential essay (and some others) on the human situation from a feminine perspective in 1960. She was instructor in religion in Hobart and William Smith Colleges in Geneva and New York. She received her education at Bates College, the University of Chicago, and the Union Theological Seminary (Goldstein 1960, 100).

The key point of controversy for Christian thinkers is the relationship between men and women and whether Genesis 1:27 undermines a hierarchical categorization of the sexes. Male Christian authors have argued for centuries that creation in the image of God as male and female does not necessarily lead to an egalitarian relationship between men and women (Gonzalez 2007, x). Women are seen as possessing the image deficiently, for example, or only in relationship with men. Such interpretations have falsely denied the full image of God in women (equated with her bodiliness), yet elevate man who is rational and spiritual to be the right and full image of God (2007, x).

Translations in the different Bibles also contribute to these negativity. For example, the New Revised Standard Version Bible translates Psalms 8:4 as: “What are *human beings* that you are mindful of *them*, *mortals* that you care for *them*?” The language used here is ‘human beings’ and ‘mortals’ and ‘them.’ Where as compared to the King James Version (KJV), the Modern King James Version (MKJV), the American Standard Version (ASV), the Bible in Basic English (BBE) and the Revised Standard Version (RSV), the words used on the same verse are ‘man’ and ‘son of man’ and ‘him.’ These different translations affect the way people think and interpret God, the Bible and Man.

In Vanuatu, people respect the Bible literally keep the word. So if the translation puts God as ‘him’ then God is male. For example the Bislama<sup>10</sup> Bible translates Genesis 1:26-27 as “Nao God i tok bakegen, i talem se, “*I gud yumi mekem man, mo i gud hem i tekem fasen blong yumi, i olsem yumi. Hem bambae i bos long ol fis, mo long ol pijin, mo long ol anamol long velej mo long anamol blong bus, i stat long olgeta we oli smosmol. Olgeta evriwan bambae oli stap aninit long han blong hem.*” Nao hem i mekem man, mo man ia i tekem fasen blong hem, i olsem hem stret. Fastaem, hem i mekem tu man nomo,

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<sup>10</sup> Bislama is the language used all over Vanuatu to communicate with others due to the diversity of dialects present.

wan we i man mo wan we i woman.” Compared to the NRSV version: “Then God said, “*Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth.*” So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he create them, male and female he created them.” Side by side the NRSV and our Bislama Bible say different things. Man is stressed more in Bislama and sort of created first before the woman, whereas the NRSV is short, to the point and gender neutral.

Vanuatu, through the NGO’s has tried to find creative, simple and localized ways to do Domestic violence workshops and awareness programs. However, most of its reading resources are in French, English and Bislama. It was until recently that successful groups such as the *Wan Smol Bag Theatre*<sup>11</sup> presented a lot of understandable awareness of social issues in their acting using Bislama. Now most of the resources are in Bislama, yet people do not take the time to read it.

Some of the wording on the resources<sup>12</sup> are not easy for a simple person to understand. For example, legal language is hard to understand if not explained well. Moreover, the spelling is in Bislama yet, the original English word is used. For example: authority spelt as ‘otority’; or Penal Code Act as Penel Kod Ak<sup>13</sup>.

Tongamoa (1988, vii) stated that many of our Pacific history and culture has always been written from a foreign perspective thus giving another interpretation, or does not

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<sup>11</sup> Wan Smolbag is a non-government organization based in Vanuatu but operates all over the Pacific. It creates awareness and engages with issues surrounding education, health, the environment, youth and gender. It started in 1989 and this year, 2019, celebrates its 30 years. (wan smolbag.org)

<sup>12</sup> Some of the resources mentioned are in Appendix 2 page 108 and 109.

<sup>13</sup> Look at the language on a pamphlet translated by the Vanuatu Women’s Centre and supported by AusAid on Appendix 2 on page 108.

capture the actual meaning. Original languages have to be used to be effective and capture people's interest, especially on domestic violence.

In 1988, a workshop held by UNESCO gathered indigenous women from Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu in order to hear their voices on domestic violence against women in general. The Vanuatu participant at that time was Kathleen Rarua, who is the first Ni-Van female graduate with a Diploma in Education from USP (University of the South Pacific) in 1972 (Daily Post, July 2018), and who also served as the Vice Secretary of the Vanuatu National Council of Women when it started in 1980. She was a strong advocate for women then, and still is today.

She states "... the structural relationships in the social and political institutions of traditional Vanuatu society are based on personal achievements and accumulated wealth in which the *big man* achieves his status by manipulating the social and economic institutions (Rarua 1988, 80). Social occasions normally involve huge feasts where exchange and distribution of accumulated wealth such as mats, yams, bananas, pigs and kava, with the understanding that gifts are to be reciprocated in one way or another. The *big man* is one who can afford plenty of mats, crops, pigs for important social and traditional activities thus has status and power."

The *big man's* success comes from the women, who are an economic asset that brings wealth to the husband. A man who has many wives is usually wealthy and of high status, not because he could afford the bride prices involved, but because the wives' services produces more wealth necessary for status-achieving activities (Rarua 1988, 80). Without this wealth, a man's political and social power reduces to nothing, so a woman's role is to ensure that her husband is successful.

Unfortunately, polygamy and bride price tie a woman to her husband for life. It is also the root cause of women's inferiority in Vanuatu society. She is only helpful in

building up her husband's status. However, these views reinforced religious and biblical teachings (Rarua 1988, 81). She states that in the late 1960s up to the 70s showed a high mortality rate of women decreasing after the age of 35 due to too much hard labour or violence inflicted by men (Rarua 1988, 79).

Vanuatu regards its women well, however, the high rates of domestic violence makes this questionable. Rarua's statistics from her time compared to today does not differ much, except that with the mass media today violence and death are on face book for all to see even if the murderer is unknown. Some tragic killings that have been made public (UNICEF 2015, 4), have caused the women and men around the Port Vila and Luganville town to take to the streets with banners voicing out their concern (Radio New Zealand, 2016).

The quest of the 'big man' system does have violence between the man and his wives. He is the boss and his wives have to obey him otherwise they bear the consequences. However, today polygamy no longer exists, (apart from extra marital affairs) but the bride price does. When a marriage takes place, all the family come together with resources to help-out. Most contribution become the bride price. Unfortunately, this causes the mentality of 'being bought' moreover, she is to serve him because he bought her. The rural areas in Vanuatu are notorious for this type of mentality.

#### **1.2.6. How Effective is the Law?**

The Vanuatu Daily Post (2017) had an article concerning domestic violence by Anita Roberts, who quoted the outgoing Team Leader of the Road for Development Program (R4D) under the Department of Public Works (PWD), Joeena Simpson. She is Australian and in her farewell speech, she included two recent tragic deaths in Vila: "Vanuatu cannot progress in the way it does if violence continues...Women breed the

future of this country, but they cannot nurture or provide care needed for their children when they are beaten.”

Joeena Simpson is an Australian and a mother of two who has worked in some of our Pacific Islands before coming to Vanuatu in 2016 and left in 2017. She wanted her children to experience the Pacific way of life thus made the choice of having her children with her wherever she goes in the Pacific. The interconnectedness and communal love and sharing is big in the Pacific, whereas she quotes “Australia has lost that connection.” Yet, what surprises her is that this special connection in Vanuatu is often marred by the amount of shameful domestic violence (Daily Post, 2017).

The Vanuatu Constitution in chapter two section one talks about fundamental rights and freedom of the individual (1980) says:

The Republic of Vanuatu recognizes that subject to any restrictions imposed by law on non-citizens, all persons are entitled to the following fundamental rights and freedoms of the individual without discrimination on the grounds of race, place of origin, religious or traditional beliefs, political opinions, language or sex, but subject to respect for the rights and freedoms of others, and to the legitimate public interest in defence, safety, public order, welfare and health – (a) life; (b) liberty; (c) security of the person; (d) protection of the law; (e) freedom from inhuman treatment and forced labour; (f) freedom of conscience and worship; (g) freedom of expression; (h) freedom of assembly and association; (i) freedom of movement; (j) protection for the privacy of the home and other property and from unjust deprivation of property; (k) equal treatment under the law or administrative action, except that no law shall be inconsistent with this sub-paragraph insofar as it makes provision for the special benefit, welfare, protection or advancement of females, children and young persons, members of under-privileged groups or inhabitants of less developed areas (Vanuatu Constitution, 1980).

However, it did not specify domestic violence until 2008, when the Parliament passed the Family Protection Law No: 28. Section 107 of the Penal Code Act says in Bislama: “Hem i tabu blong wan i faetem narawan” or “No person shall commit intentional assault on the body of another person (Section 107 of Panel Code Act, 39). The penalty ranges from three months if no physical damage occurs; temporary damage