



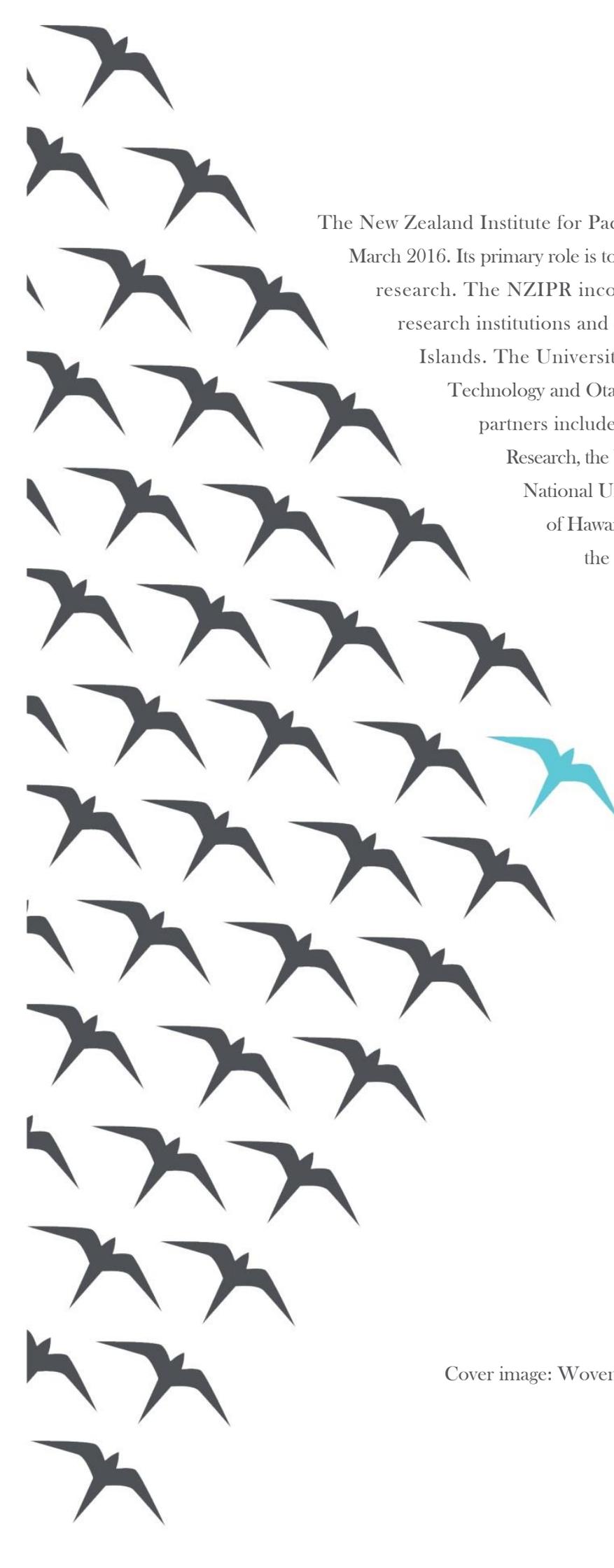
**NEW ZEALAND
INSTITUTE FOR
PACIFIC RESEARCH**

Reading the Bible in Context

Mercy Ah Siu-Maliko

Tatala le Ta'ui a le Atua | Rolling Out the Fine Mat of Scripture
Bible Study Series





About NZIPR

The New Zealand Institute for Pacific Research (NZIPR) was launched in March 2016. Its primary role is to promote and support excellence in Pacific research. The NZIPR incorporates a wide network of researchers, research institutions and other sources of expertise in the Pacific Islands. The University of Auckland, Auckland University of Technology and Otago University lead the NZIPR. Its support partners include the New Zealand Institute of Economic Research, the University of the South Pacific, the Australian National University, Peking University, the University of Hawaii, the Secretariat for the Pacific Community, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade and the Pacific Cooperation Foundation.

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Reading the Bible in Context

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Tatala Le Ta'ui A Le Atua in Samoan Culture

*Tatala le Ta'ui a le Atua*¹ presents a series of Bible studies rooted in the importance of being relational in the Samoan culture. It embraces the belief that the self takes its form from maintaining relationships. *Tatala le Ta'ui a le Atua* as a Samoan saying articulates the necessity to reconnect with one's God, ancestors, neighbour/s and environment, to reveal a person's genuine self-identity rooted in the relationship of respect, and concurrently, revealing the image of God in humans.

The word *ta'ui* has a specific use. It's a word used to refer to the finest of fine mats that has long been pressed and reciprocally cared for within homes. This delicate fine mat is not rolled together with other ordinary rolls of mats or anything else. Although the same pandanus leaves are used to weave fine mats and mats used every day, still a mat cannot be called a treasure, unless it is the finest of fine mats. It is a fine mat treasured and protected. It is a fine mat that is not simply laid bare, sat on or for someone to trample on, but a fine mat people respect. It is not an ordinary fine mat, displayed using long sticks to hold it up because of its size. It is one fine mat that can be folded and put in an elderly woman's woven basket or it can be simply held in an orator's hand. Another view is that because the fine mat has been kept for long, it can become delicate, shiny, and eye-catching. This is the reason why when such fine mat is opened or rolled out, those who

roll it out literally have goose bumps and say, "Oh it is the treasure of a noble." This is the type of fine mat seldom rolled out except on special and significant occasions; then, such a treasure is rolled out in public. The use of this Samoan saying in this project articulates the significant role of scripture as the finest fine mat rolled out to transform human relationships damaged by gender-based violence against women and violence in general.

Defining Gender Based Violence (GBV)

GBV is violence that is targeted against individuals or groups on the basis of their gender. This violence is a clear sign of deeply entrenched power inequalities between men and women. While it cuts across class, ethnicity, religion, ability, age and location, it primarily affects women and girls. The term GBV is hence often interchangeably used with 'violence against women'.² This violence is often perpetrated by men, and women and girls are often the victims. In Samoa and other contexts, GBV always results from unequal power relationships between men and women. Violence is directed specifically against a woman because she is a woman, and because she has less power than her (male) abuser. GBV includes, but is not limited to, physical, sexual, and psychological harm.³

1 This concept was proposed by Rev. Latu Kioa to articulate the connection between the Samoan symbol of fine mat and scripture. The Samoan explanation of the term was also written by Kioa in the Samoan language and translated into English by the author.

2 <http://www.un.org> accessed 23 October 2017
3 United Nations Population Fund, Gender Theme Group (1998).

Bible Study Method

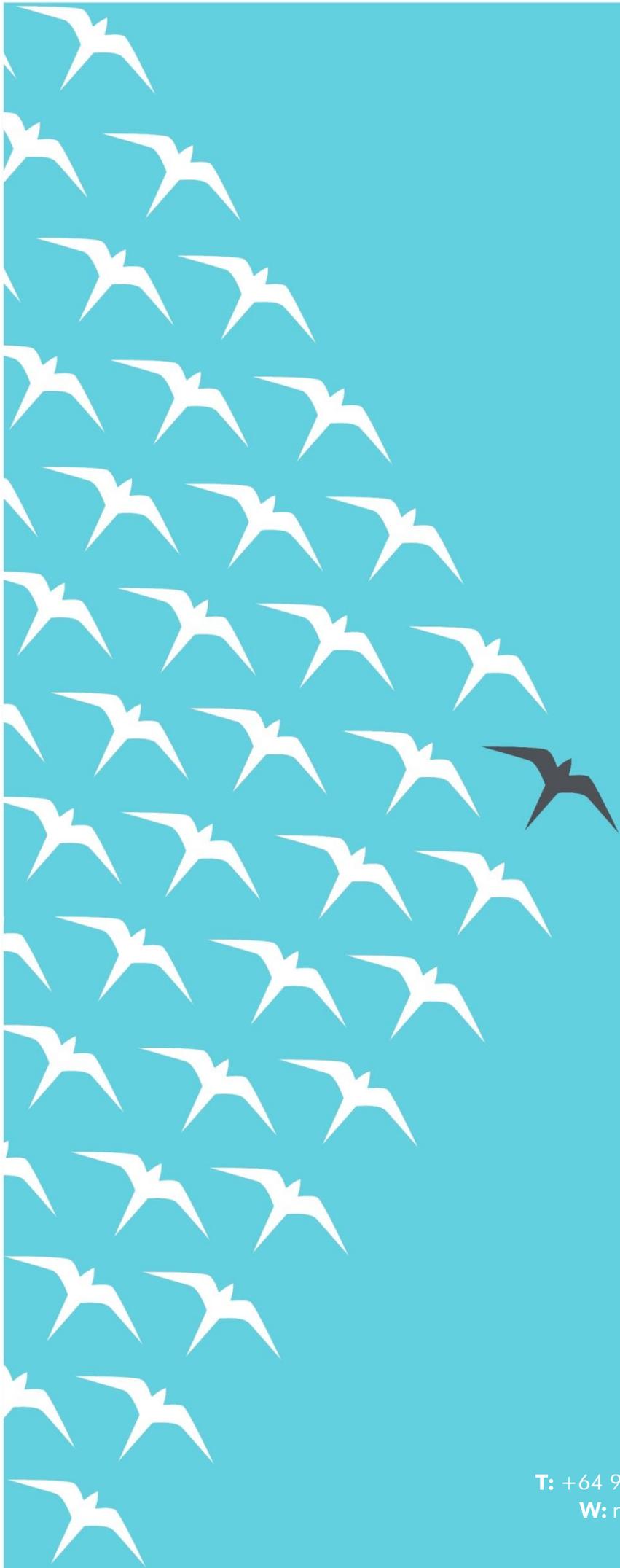
This series of Bible studies draws on the work of the Brazilian educator, Paulo Freire. The aim of Freire's model of transformation is to empower people through the process of self-awareness or consciousness raising. It is a creative way of enabling people to think for themselves, so that what they learn becomes authenticated in their lives. This includes the sharing of ideas, debates, dialogue, discussion, and working with others as subjects rather than as objects.⁴ Freire, in his educational philosophy, advocates that 'Education is the key to liberation.' For Freire, education is never neutral. It is 'political' in the sense that its main objective is either to maintain the status quo, or to educate for liberation.⁵

Using Freire's method as a guide to doing Bible studies serves the following purposes: to develop dialogue, participation, self-identity, empowerment and confidence in participants (men and women); and to transform their spiritual lives.⁶ This 'praxis-centred' methodology attempts to move the participants toward 'reflection-action' exercises that will ultimately bear fruit in the form of empowering and liberating Good News for the churches and communities where the participants are situated, and especially in relation to the issue of GBV against women. The designed Bible studies follow a specific structure that begins from raising awareness to concrete action/s as an ongoing process, taking into account the importance of the contexts and needs of participants.

⁴ Paulo Freire, *Cultural Action for Freedom* (Boston, Massachusetts: Harvard University, 1972), 27.

⁵ See Mercy Ah Siu-Maliko, "Conscientization and Pacific Women," *Pacific Journal of Theology*, no. 41 (2009).

⁶ *Ibid*



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