

# The value of unpaid work – a Cook Islands view

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4 September 2019

*Na te rima maro'iro'i a toku metua vaine au i tautā, i rauka'i teia tūranga, kia riro au ei tupa'u tuatau.*

*I stand in this space because of my mother's efforts, that today I might be worthy to stand in her stead.*

I remember a conversation a few years back when a good friend noted to me that “...everything, everything is measurable”. This point seems relevant when contextualising this think piece on the value of unpaid work. What is it that is being measured? I don't quite have the words yet, but the “unpaid” bit shouts out at me!

## **Tūranga**

I start this paper with the concept of tūranga. Important because it provides a context through which culture and people of that culture interact. It starts with the assumption that you are more than your circumstance(s). For example, in a New Zealand setting unemployment or being a recipient of a government benefit can influence an individual's perceived or actual tūranga. Value is placed on the economic worth of the work a person or persons does. From a Cook Islands perspective, the value is placed on the person and the tūranga inherent to their identity.

Tūranga is the acknowledgement by self and others of one's position, standing and potential within the collective and a number of collectives. Tūranga is strengthened when the individual and collective are empowered to claim their place as determined first by their genealogy - papa'anga. Tūranga brings with it expectations and these expectations influence roles and responsibilities. For example, I am one of three sisters and now the only one living in New Zealand, my tūranga of sister brings with it the role and responsibility of receiving family members when they travel to New Zealand.

## **Ātinga**

I'm New Zealand-born, and alongside my sister Rangī, was raised by our Cook Islands migrant parents. We attended the local PIC church (Presbyterian) and grew up in a church community alongside Samoans and Tokelauans. I am still part of that church community. For many Cook Islanders church is both a 'faith' and 'culture' based vehicle. For many Pacific and Cook Islanders for that matter, the church in New Zealand provides a medium through which cultural values and practices are interpreted and given life.

From that church environment, I learnt the concept of 'ātinga'. Ātinga from a Cook Islands Christian perspective is an offering to God or in support of God's work. Some churches have annual ātinga. An offering is given with a willing heart. It is the highest form of giving whether in labour, goods or money. Some churches have guidelines around giving.

From a cultural perspective, ātinga is associated often with the giving of a tribute of food by a lower chief to a higher chief (often at the end of year) in recognition of land allotted to them; or it can be a gift from a tenant planter to the landowner. In both situations, the ātinga might be complemented with labour towards a project or event of the high chief eg the tenant planter and his family will assist in the preparations of a feast for the wedding of the landowner's daughter.

To 'aka'ātinga is to make a promise/pledge ie to give service to God. One can also make a pledge to a person, organisation or cause. The ātinga is given without expectation of acknowledgement or reward. In this way, the act of giving an ātinga is the planter tenant's demonstration of honouring and respecting the relationship between his family and that of the landowner.

### **'Akau'e'anga**

My parents migrated from Rarotonga to Wellington and joined other family members who had migrated earlier. Here they found jobs, a home and were part of the early Cook Islands community. Here they connected with their respective extended families, which meant that there were numerous family events to participate in.

Being with our parents at these various events whether in Wellington or other parts of the country, ensured that we observed our families in action, were allocated tasks according to our capabilities whilst becoming entwined in the komakoma (chatter) of our relatives who were busy performing their duties.

Learning what to do and how to do it was a scaffolded activity. If not our own mother, there was always a relative who had expertise over the task ready to lead us. I got to see how what I was doing connected with what others were doing and how combined efforts benefitted the collective.

The term 'akau'e'anga can also thought of as a command or requirement, and associated with commands or expectations of Christian practice. More recently I have used the term to explain the idea of 'duty of care'. Within a family context, my responses to different situations are influenced by my understanding of my duty/duties of care to particular persons.

The nature of our kin relationship will inform of my duty to that person or persons and the extent of that duty – am I a parental figure, a sister, a daughter or grand-daughter, sister-in-law or a friend who brings the practices of my papa'anga to inform on my akau'e'anga to my friend?

My older sister passed recently, my 'akau'e'anga to her, her children, our immediate family and village community is very specific. During the bereavement period, I became the 'mother' and the eldest. How I contributed, what I said through to what I wore, on reflection, was very much determined by my understanding of the 'akau'e'anga of a sister. One of the challenges that face Cook Islanders is managing the expectations associated with akau'e'anga. Understanding the value(s) that informs a cultural concept is critical to managing the expectations of others and yourself. If the value is to 'welcome' then you have the ability to call on the most intimate of welcomes to a large and formal welcome.

### **'Anga'anga**

I come from a working-class family, my father was a watersider and my mother a night (and day) cleaner. My parents were union members and also Labour Party members. They were strong

advocates of fair pay for fair work and marched on parliament with their placards in support of the same.

My sister and I have both done our share of protesting. Like many Pacific kids, I worked alongside my mother as a cleaner at night and during the day, I have distributed flyers across Wellington's suburbs as well as done one-off labouring contracts.

We did the same work as adults and in the main paid fairly. My current employment, whilst it does not involve physical labour is still 'anga'anga.

Irrespective of the environment, work is work. Work is remunerated through a type of payment system which may involve money, exchange of one service for another, in-kind, or for the benefit of the collective. The remuneration may be made to the individual or to the collective.

You can also be involved in God's work, whilst it is unlikely to involve an hourly rate it will involve specific tasks and an appointed overseer. Church or community working bees are an organised response to a need. Most of the church working bees I have been part of will include a catering team to feed the workers.

## **Conclusion**

The concepts of tūranga, ātinga, 'akau'e'anga and anga'anga frame both the value given to people and who they are. Atinga situates service to God and to others as the highest form of giving, which is given without expectation of acknowledgement or reward. If there is a reward then that is more likely to be as a consequence of the spirit of love and service felt by the individual; it may also be in the form of a carefully constructed thank you -careful because a loud and brash thank may bring offence.

The ātinga may be given as a pledge and or the inspired response to a need. This is different from 'akau'e'anga which situates a person's tūranga as the influencer of the performance of duties of care. The duty of care is activated on the basis that a person or persons accept their tūranga and the roles and responsibilities that come with that tūranga. It is a cultural mechanism that upholds honouring and respect between persons.

'Anga'anga is work undertaken to meet a need. The work is likely to be structured and goal orientated. It places value on the completion of tasks for the greater good of the collective, whether paid or unpaid.

Therein lies the dichotomy, value placed on work undertaken versus the value of the person and their contribution to the collective. If we placed value on tūranga, ātinga, 'akau'e'anga and anga'anga then the tūranga of women and the work they often do to care for the tūranga (dignity and respect) of others will not need to be limited to the dollar value.