GEOGRAPHIES OF TEXTILE AUTHENTICITY: MARKING TONGAN TEMPORAL AND SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS IN DIASPORIC CULTURAL PRODUCTION

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Among Tongan women who live in the diaspora but who were born in Tonga, making *koloa* (traditional barkcloths and fine mats) is often a cherished memory of their younger days living in their ethnic homeland. In part, this is because—even though ceremonial exchange of *koloa* in the diaspora continues at increasing rates (Herda 1999)—most *koloa* exchanged there is transported from the homeland in completed form. One exception to this has been the work of elderly Tongan women in the diaspora who have been reviving the practice of making *koloa* in Auckland, New Zealand, in the past two decades. Of particular note to analysts like me is *ngatu pepa*, a textile employing synthetic fibers and dyes that was invented in diaspora by Tongan women who lived in the United States and that has been increasingly a source of the valuable and highly desired barkcloth-like textile (Addo 2007, 2013; see also Drake 2002). Tongans conceptualize their textiles as both (exchangeable) wealth and (visual) art, and each kind of *koloa*—barkcloth, fine mats, hand- and machine-made fabric cloths—occupy a place on a conceptual hierarchy. Likewise, Tongans themselves interrelate through a hierarchy of age, gender, and rank, and the degree of deference or familiarity and modes of speaking with which people interact is guided by the principle of the *vā*, or the spatiotemporal distance between individuals and kin groups (Kaʻili, forthcoming). Here, I present an ethnographic analysis of how Tongan women of different generations engage in seemingly hierarchal relations to

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produce symmetry, to borrow from Kaʻili (forthcoming; see also Kaʻili in this issue), and thus harmony in their social relations with Tongans globally and with their own ancestors. They hereby realize their cultural *fatongia* (duty) to produce beauty in the *vā*, social space between themselves (Kaʻili, forthcoming) in order to effect appropriate time-space transformations (Māhina 2004; see also Māhina in this volume), and they do so by authenticating textiles through production and exchange.

In this analysis, I consider two forms of barkcloth: *ngatu* (made from the beaten, felted and hand-decorated inner bark of the paper mulberry tree) and *ngatu pepa* (a textile with color, weight, and hand-applied decoration similar to *ngatu* but made from synthetic fabric sheets and, thus, devoid of any bark content). Women often characterize their choice of what kind of barkcloth to produce and to offer in ceremonial exchange based on *where* they are located: *ngatu ngatu* for Tonga versus *ngatu pepa* and other "hybrid" barkcloth for the diaspora (see Addo 2007). Moreover, when women who were raised in the diaspora experience *koloa*-making, they contribute to intergenerational knowledge and bridge their present and future with ancestral pasts. The effect can be a seen as a time-space transformation that is at once postmodern – specifically characterized as time-space compression (Harvey 1990) – and as ancient as ancestral belief itself. This essay explores how intergenerational relationships involved in diasporic textile making encompass the bridging or crossing of the *vā*, space, between women in different generations and different geographical locations. I analyze the way time and space transformations are effected by elderly urban-dwelling women migrants who define themselves in part through wealth production and, more important, through gift exchange. I argue that as they move to new places and continue to alter such feminized processes, they remake the scale of the territory over which they and their communities *live out a life being authentically Tongan*.

Tā and *Vā* in Material Culture Production

Scholars of Tongan culture emphasize that social relations are made harmonious—that is, symbolically and materially balanced—by the space between people being crossed by the presentation of gifts of *koloa*, feast foods, kava, and money (Kaʻili, forthcoming; Kaeppler 1998a; Young Leslie 2004; Evans 2001). Such objects have been said to constitute things of great material value, objects of aesthetic worth, and works of art (Kaeppler 1998b). Here, I am concerned with the artistic qualities of *koloa*: textiles made and deployed by Tongan women. However, I am not interested in confirming objects like barkcloths and fine mats as arts in a Western vein: providing intellectual, sensual, and (in the case of commodity art) economic experiences that may

be "effective" only or primarily on the individual level. I attribute the growing clarity of my own analysis as a cultural outsider to ʻOkusitino Māhina's *ta-va* theory of time-space reality and Tēvita Kaʻili's theory of *tauhi vā* as the creation of beauty through sociospatial relationships. It is not "beauty [as] in the eye of a holder" that I examine but rather the *fakaʻofoʻofa*, beauty, rendered by symmetry and balance in social relationships between people (Kaʻili 2005). Whatever the material accomplishments that accrue—for when someone offers a gift, they almost invariably receive some sort of material reciprocation—women undertake the production of *koloa* as a process of reorganization of their own and others' interactions in time and space with the express aim of creating beauty (Māhina 2004). These are, inherently and preferably, a set of social processes.

What elderly women do in time and space when consciously imparting the traditional skills of barkcloth making, even in the context of producing hybrid cloth, is particularly interesting in understanding the how and why of Tongan material culture. The object they create is more likely to be considered *fakaʻofoʻofa* (beautiful) if the process of creation enhances the gendered and intergenerational *vā* (or space) between the women themselves. Moreover, teaching younger women and girls to produce (giftable) objects constitutes a culturally efficacious way for women to employ their skills because it both fulfills women's *fatongia* (duty) of teaching youngers to be *poto* (skilled) in Tonganness (Young Leslie 2004) and effects *tauhi vā* between the women themselves. Thus, even if they do not make barkcloth themselves, *knowledge* of textile making is a prescribed *fatongia*, duty, of Tongan women.

Gift exchange also constitutes *tauhi vā*, and gifting *koloa* is particularly efficacious because recognizing people with textiles regenerates Tongans culturally (Kaeppler 1998b). Kaʻili (forthcoming) would say that the events at which gifts are presented and reciprocated constitute periods of time (*tā*) during which Tongan individuals create symmetry, or beauty, in the spaces between them. The Tongan women I met during fieldwork in New Zealand (2000–2002) believed in the efficacy of cloth production and exchange on their relationships with non-Tongans as well, such as the relations between Tongan communities and New Zealand political authorities (Addo 2013), thus their intentionality in pursuing cloth production *as tauhi vā* deserves some comment.

As noted above, the raw materials for making barkcloths and fine mats are not grown in New Zealand, so these diasporic women had to find and make use of resources available in their immediate surroundings to fulfill their *fatongia*. One such way involved depending on the relationship with—or crossing the *va* between—themselves and the New Zealand authorities. The women applied for and accepted government funding, using it to finance

local development schemes that require that cloth be produced primarily as a commodity. The women also fulfill a related *fatongia* to present textiles as gifts by resourcefully using the materials at hand. Rather than expressly selling the *koloa* they produce through these local government-sponsored development schemes, women prefer to deploy them as gifts (Horan 2002). Several groups of Tongan women in Auckland have been making textiles like barkcloths since the late 1990s. Below, I discuss their methods of making *ngatu pepa* as well as the more traditional method for making barkcloth from natural materials grown in the homeland.

Ngatu Pepa Production: Cloth Making as Knowledge Production

Tutu

There are three main stages to producing *ngatu*, barkcloth, from *hiapo*, the inner bark of the paper mulberry tree. Tongan women engage in *tutu*, or the beating of the bark with heavy wooden mallets whose parallel grooves help to break the tough fibers of the stiff, off-white inner bark. After twenty to thirty minutes of beating, the *hiapo* is sufficiently soft and has increased in width from a few inches to about a foot or a foot and a half. The strips are then dried and joined to form larger strips that are called *feta'aki*. These will be stored until it is time to assemble *ngatu*.

Ngatu pepa, the barkcloth-like textile made today without *hiapo*, circumvents the arduous beating that constitutes *tutu* and supplies diasporic women a material with which to produce *koloa*. The name *ngatu pepa* means *ngatu* made from "paper," which is what Tongan women dubbed "vylene" when they first incorporated it into their cloth production. Vylene has a similar weight and dye-holding quality to beaten *hiapo*, paper mulberry bark, and women's groups I met in Auckland during my fieldwork had to purchase many meters of it—with New Zealand government-sourced or some other funds—from local stores in town (Addo 2007). It is important to point out that *ngatu pepa* is only one material manifestation of a series of changes that have long been taking place in the production and aesthetics of Tongan barkcloth. Indeed, *ngatu pepa* is not the first "barkcloth" to be the subject of debate about the authenticity of continually emerging categories of Tongan cloth. Around the same time that *ngatu pepa* was first being produced in the Tongan diaspora, Cathy Small (1997) documented a variety of barkcloth that Tongan women in villages in Tonga made with a top layer of *feta'aki* and a lower layer of vylene. Vylene had a similar weight and held rubbed-in dye just as well as *feta'aki*, but the greatest advantage was that women could produce twice as much barkcloth in the same amount of time and were thus

able to begin meeting the demands of their own ritual needs at home as well as those of women in the diaspora.

Koka'anga

The second stage is the one during which the textile actually takes shape and its *kupesi*, patterns, are applied. Women work in groups called *toulanganga* for this stage, seated in facing pairs at the *papa*, a long, low worktable to which they have affixed relief pattern boards called *kupesi*. If in Tonga and if making *ngatu* from *hiapo*, women will place the *feta'aki* strips parallel to the *papa* (worktable) pasting the strips edge to edge with cooked flour-and-water paste. They will place the top layer of *feta'aki* in a direction perpendicular to the *papa*, rubbing dye over the surface of the textile such that the relief patterns on the *kupesi* below imprint clearly on the upper layer. They use a natural dye called *koka*.[1] Because of the traditional use of *koka* for decorating *ngatu*, this second major stage of *ngatu* production is called *koka'anga*, or "what one does with *koka*."

When women in Auckland make *ngatu pepa*, they sit at the *papa* and paste the pieces of vylene together in a similar way to women making *ngatu* in Tonga. Sometimes they will have stitched the pieces of vylene for the lower layer into one large piece whose dimensions will determine the size of the finished textile. Just as they do for *ngatu*, women in Auckland paste the strips for the upper layer at right angles to the seams of the lower layer, and they rub the upper surface with dyes so that the *kupesi* (patterns) show up on the *mata* (face) of the cloth. The dyes used by diasporic *toulanganga* (cloth-making groups) are typically synthetic. The women in the Auckland *toulanganga* groups are very resourceful. I know one group who had their husbands and sons bring home bags of discarded red brick powder from the construction sites on which the men worked. This powder was mixed with water to a consistency like that of *koka*.

It is more or less agreed on in the literature that because *koka'anga* is the stage at which *ngatu* and *ngatu* paper are given their *mata*, face, it is the most important phase of the making the textiles (Addo 2013; Teilhet Fisk 1991). There is other evidence for this claim. Often, when *koloa* is gifted, a man from the receiving side calls out "*mālō ē koka'anga*," praising women (in general) for assembling such a thing of appropriate beauty.[2] Moreover, in the diaspora, elderly women desire to be included in this stage of *ngatu-pepa* production. They sit behind yet symbolically above the younger women, providing instruction, which reifies notions of duty (*fatongia*) as ideally accomplished in the social space between members of different generations. The sense and performance of duty fills the space. Also crossing this space

physically are gifts, which transform the garage (traditionally male space), church hall, or family's back backyard where the women assemble for the cooperative textile work.

The younger women receive "gifts" of the older women's guidance and reciprocate with their obedience and with food that they have prepared ahead of time. The *koka'anga* thereby becomes a space of beauty and of beauty creation. In Auckland's *koka'anga* groups in the early 2000s, some of which still function today, younger women perform their *fatongia* both by continuing to make the textiles and by relying on the expertise of elderly women. This results in a creation of both relationships and objects that are *faka'ofo'ofa*, beautiful. By working together, Tongan women fulfill their *fatongia* (duty) to meet respectfully and productively in the space, the *vā*, between themselves.[3] *Koka'anga* does more than alter space, then: it also alters relationships.

Tohi

The final stage of decoration of *ngatu* and *ngatu pepa* is called *tohi*. During this stage, women sit together and retrace the rubbed-in *kupesi* (designs) on the *mata* (face) of the *ngatu* or *ngatu pepa* using a darker dye. Younger women perform *tohi ngatu* in their homes along with relatives or even in a group themselves. *Tohi* does not require all the women in the *toulanganga* to be working together simultaneously. Neither does *tohi* require the presence of skilled older women. Elderly women are indispensable at *koka'anga*, however, highlighting the importance of *koka'anga* over *tutu* and *tohi* as a key stage in barkcloth making, one that encodes a sense of realness or authenticity.

Shifting Forms of Authenticity: *Ngatu Pepa* as *Fakalakalaka* (Development) and as *Tauhi Vā*

One other type of event that elderly women volunteer to attend are *'a'āhi* (showing, viewing), or the formal displays of newly made *koloa* that a *toulanganga* will have made at the end of a several-month stretch of textile making. The elderly women are included in those thanked for their *ngaue lahi* (hard work) and *'ofa* (love, devotion) in lending their knowledge, if not their hands, to the production of these things of beauty (Addo 2007).

At *'a'āhi* in Auckland, Tongan women often present gifts to Auckland City Council or New Zealand government liaisons who attend these formal events in order to ascertain how the women have used the public funding they have received. Moreover, the women represent the role played by these objects in proper social relations—as gifts imbued with their spirits and as objects

indexing their ability to effect certain kinds of time-space transformations. In this case, women compress time, embodying the gifts of their women ancestors who beat the mana of Pulotu, the ancestral homeland, into them (Filihia 2001). Not only are time and space altered for these women, but they make central a different epistemology from the one in which their modern and diasporic lives are embedded. These women make efforts to live by important indigenous Tongan principles, even when interacting with dominant cultural outsiders (i.e., *pakeha*, or whites) among whom Tongans live in the diaspora. From a policy perspective, greater understanding of the centrality of Moana notions of agency of people sharing gendered and generational knowledge (*poto*) and responsibility (*fatongia*) at the intersections of time and space is highly advantageous. Recognizing that Tongan material priorities reflect crucial social priorities has the potential to empower New Zealand's various human services institutions in assisting these ethnic communities in more culturally appropriate ways. Furthermore, Tongan women are also empowered to help themselves and their communities on their own terms.

That the women I interviewed in the early 2000s perceive themselves as having a choice in how they contribute to their families' monetary and traditional wealth is key to their identities and their well-being (Addo 2013). In the competitive modern political economy of New Zealand, Tongan women are increasingly called on to perform as the main breadwinners in their families. In the gendered division of labor, they have the choice both to engage in textile production in order to bring earn money (the aim of the Auckland City Council) and to procure and gift textiles. Elderly women, especially, are indispensable in the relations of production of *koloa* in the diaspora. Thus, they must be recognized for their contributions to family productivity and must not be considered simply marginal in the political economy of the Tongan diaspora. Even though they are usually dependents, requiring care and assistance from younger people in their families, they themselves often care for children and have leadership roles in church congregations. They are indispensable to the production of material and symbolic wealth as well as to human capital, yet they are often—in state discourses of who constitutes a productive, laboring body—omitted from analyses of Pacific Islander production.

Producing or exchanging textiles on behalf of their kin groups affects how Tongans experience the temporal and spatial dimensions of their identities. Other scholars of Tonga, such as Meredith Filihia, have suggested that *tutu*, the act of beating out (*tā*) paper mulberry bark makes present in both time and space the mana of Pulotu – the ancestral homeland (Filihia 2001). Restraint from beating *tutu* (*tae tutu*, *tae tā*) is one indication that a funeral is being observed in a community or a village (Teilhet-Fisk 1991). So beating

mulberry bark is shown to be a significant activity such that its cessation marks a liminal time period. Yet how do we think of the time-beating activity of Tongan women who make barklike cloth from raw materials that require no beating? By producing appropriate social relations and highly desired and treasured objects—that is, by engaging in *koka'anga*, doing so collectively, with prayer and joy and commitment—women afford Tongans a way of bridging or creating symmetry in social relations. These are highly desired and constitute a form of resistance to the modern state's expectation that people labor autonomously and individually to provide their own sustenance and, thus, earn their personhood.

It is from such modern state discourses—a common accompaniment to aid money and international recognition of emerging states by the long-standing modern nations—that we derive the current meanings of the Tongan term *fakalakalaka* (to develop; development; improvement). In addition to mandating modern wealth as currency, states have tended to usher in a consciousness toward linear time-space conceptualization, and linear time is now a foundational experience of modernity the world over (Kofman 2005, 526). The modern state has also reproduced gendered constructions of space (where public/private map onto male/female), time (where linear time vs. cyclical time map onto male-vs.-feminized approaches), and bodies (where male bodies are empowered and female bodies seem to require control) (see McClintock among others). Yet today, the state has long been transcended by feminized processes, such as labor migration (Kofman 2005, 522; for Tongan women's role as early pioneers on transnational migration, cf. Gailey 1992). One way women have effected this is through their undeniable agency in the "behind the scenes" work of the informal economy, which is so closely linked with the economy of affect (see Addo and Besnier 2008). As Ka'ili states in his own promulgation of the *tā-vā* theory, shifting the emotional state between people effects a decoration of the (social) space between them (Ka'ili, forthcoming).

Networks developed and facilitated by migration intersect foundationally, crucially, sensually, and emotionally with the "informal economy" (Addo and Besnier 2008). For contemporary Tongans, the greatest currency remains social relations, and Tongan women's wealth is still "queen," even though money and commodities are absolute necessities for life today. It has been important here to try to think about how elderly urban-dwelling women migrants who define themselves in part through art making and, more important, through gift exchange continue to alter such feminized processes, thus remaking the scale over which they and their communities *live out a life being Tongan*. Whether producing or exchanging *koloa*, or ceasing cloth-production for a particular ritual period, women transform how their co-ethnics

experience their own ontological realities. In the *tā-vā* theoretical vein, I theorize that women decorate the space between them and even shift their experience of time and transform spaces they inhabit through barkcloth production and exchange, regardless of the textile's material makeup or final form. This is the reason I consider *ngatu pepa* an embodiment of key modern Tongan processes of identity production: by characterizing them as modern, I mean to suggest that these processes both transform and transcend time (then, now) and space (there, here).

Diasporic Authenticity: Crossing the *Vā* with a "Hybrid" Textile

Scholars have long been leery of the employment of "hybrid" as a catchall term for multicultural forms and mixed-ethnicity people (Coombes 2002; Kamehiro 2007; Kraidy 2002). Indeed, "hybrid" may be an inadequate term for describing the qualities and the appeal of *ngatu pepa*. Elsewhere, I have argued that *ngatu pepa* embodies authentic cultural processes and is thus authentic *koloa* (Addo 2007). Young Leslie and Addo (2007) have suggested the term "pragmatic creativity" as a more productive and accurate term for how Moanan people produce their cultural world from locally efficacious combinations of cultural forms. A pragmatically creative approach to the material aspects of life means that Moanans such as Tongans do not eschew materials like vylene and crushed red bricks in producing *koloa* or in otherwise performing their *fatongia*, cultural duty or obligations.

Indeed, Tongans have historically sought out foreign materials in producing things of value, thus also embracing thing with elements of *authenticated foreignness*. Implicating for the *vā* between people, Tongans' resourcefulness directly challenges the artificial, power-laden, market-driven barrier that constructs hierarchical dichotomies between Tongan and Western cultural forms. Rather than saying that new materials have been introduced into *ngatu* making by diasporic women, Tongan women I have interviewed have mostly said that vylene and synthetic dyes work just as well for or indeed constitute "Tongan things." Yet, in order for these meanings to be readable as Tongan—by Tongans and non-Tongans alike—an aesthetic based on that of *ngatu* is retained.[4]

One way this is achieved is through maintaining the centrality of the cultural aesthetic of *kupesi* (beautiful pattern), which is retained when Tongan women in the diaspora make *ngatu pepa*. The textile can serve as a gift and can thus index tradition in form and in deployment. In gifting a *ngatu pepa*, a giver elevates the relative status of the recipient and compels the recipient to reciprocate with a gift, thus reestablishing symmetry in

the *vā* between them. As the *koloa* gifts are placed before him, the person charged with receiving gifts for a family at a life ceremony such as a funeral announces "*Mālō ē kokaʻanga!*" Onlookers further affirm women with the verbal response: "*Iō*!" ("let it be so!"). Women are hereby lauded publicly for their work at turning strips of fiber and bottles of dye into textiles whose *mata* (faces) feature *kupesi* (beautiful patterns) and create beauty in social spaces. Thus, the term *poto he koka* (and not *poto he tutu*) is used to articulate appreciation for women who perform well and create beauty in relationships and on cloth from the process of *kokaʻanga*: imbuing the cloths with the *mana* of their foremothers. These women are also being praised for performing the desired *fatongia* toward their elders and chiefs and creating symmetry in their textiles and in their social and spiritual relationships.

Another way this is effected is through another fully Tongan practice: Christian prayer in groups. The making of *koloa*, a precontact tradition, was integrated into late nineteenth-and twentieth-century Tongan modernity as a fundamental part of the bodily discipline and industriousness espoused by Methodist ministries (Addo 2013). The enduring integration of religiosity and textile making is clearly indicated by the fact that Tongan women's group meetings for purposes of making cloth almost always begin and end with one women leading the others in a prayer. Such meetings also often feature a shared meal and rotating credit activity (Addo 2013; Small 1997) and other activities that can be accomplished only in a group context. As I have suggested elsewhere, women from many Pacific societies find it undesirable to produce and impossible to fathom textiles and other culturally valuable objects outside of a group context because their agency emerges from intersubjective relations, which includes communal communication with deities (Addo 2013; Jolly 2003, 136).

Conclusion: Living Out a Life Being Authentically Tongan

In other work, I argue that diasporic peoples effectively re-create their ethnic homelands through working on, with, and through particular gendered forms of cultural production (Addo 2013). Here, drawing on insights from feminist geography, I argue that such women *emplace* themselves in the minds and hearts of fellow Tongans—the social memory of their communities, if you will—by the very act of making and exchanging cloth (things of value) in physical space. They also sensually and emotionally shift how interlocutors experience space and time. Finally women are marked as the conduits of gendered and generational *mana* and themselves enjoy an altered experience of history, the present, community, and self. They engage in the

coproduction of emotion, experience, and context, and there is certainly authentic self-positioning in this.

NOTES

1. The tree that Tongans call *koka* has the scientific name: *Bishofia javanica*. Its bark, when scraped, "bleeds" a reddish-brown liquid that is mixed with water for dye making.

2. Note that I have never heard "*mālō ē tutu*" or "*mālō ē tohi*" uttered in recognition of barkcloth-making activity.

3. Among the indigenous women quilt workers and quilt makers of the Fort Berthold reservation (American Indians belonging to the Hidatsa, Mandan, and Arikra tribes), the art form "carries specific ritual obligation and compensation on the part of the learner to her teacher" (Berman 2003, 40). Similarly, Tongan women who produce *koloa* are beholden to honor and compensate older women who have trained or who continue to train and support them.

4. For example, the *lione kupesi* on *ngatu* is said to represent King Taufa'ahau Tupou I, George the First of Tonga, who dubbed himself the "lion of Tonga" (see Kaeppler 1998a) and used an eagle as an important symbol of his power and might. These symbols have resonance still today in Tonga's international diplomatic relationships, and the rugby team is called Ikale Tonga (Tongan Eagles). These designs remain central in one of the most admired and recognized *ngatu* designs, the *hala paini*, but they are not the British Lion and the American Eagle; they are the Tongan Lion and the Tongan Eagle. Local associations have been subsisted for any older (extra-Tongan) meanings they ever had. Similarly, the crown, three swords, and a cross have been "appropriated" to symbolize concepts of importance to monarchical Tonga: the Tongan monarchy, the three bloodlines in the current dynasty, and Christianity in all its Tongan variety (Kaeppler, 1998a). This imbuing of local meanings onto imported images and materials is a process of Tonganizing modernity and foreign things as well as one of authenticating what might otherwise be called hybrid cultural forms. To borrow from Ka'ili (forthcoming), it is, to Tongans, a way of creating balance between the power relations in which their communities are engaged with the rest of the world.

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