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## Creating a New Tradition: Quilting in Tonga

*Phyllis S. Herda*

*The western Polynesian islands of Tonga have a long tradition of textiles (barkcloth and fine plaited mats) being valued as items of significance and wealth. Recently Tongan women have expanded this textile repertoire to include machine-made quilts and an identifiable Tongan style of quilts is emerging. Tongan quilts are now a prominent feature of grave decorations. In addition, they are displayed and presented at a wide variety of functions including births, weddings, anniversaries, title installations, and royal celebrations. The introduction of and acceptance of quilts to this repertoire is inextricably linked to establishment of Tongan migrant communities overseas—especially in the United States. This paper examines Tongan quilts, the social and political occasions in which they are ritualized as well as the diasporic effects on quilting and on the display and presentation of quilts.*

Sewing, piecing and appliquéing quilts is a relatively new textile tradition in the islands of Tonga. The creation, display, and presentation of traditional textiles, mats woven from pandanus leaves (*kie*, *ngafingafi* or *fala*) and cloth made from the bark of the paper mulberry tree (*ngatu* or *tapa*), however, has an ancient and distinguished history in the islands.<sup>1</sup> Tongans have long categorized these textiles, all made by women, as wealth or *koloa*—"what one values" and have accorded them the highest respect in terms of the protocols of exchange. In comparison, the work, carving and agricultural, of men, *ngaue*, is best translated simply as work or labor. Textile wealth made by Tongan women reflects their high status and rank in comparison to their brothers. When it is presented, women's textile wealth also actively demon-



strates status differences between chiefly (*'eiki*) and non-chiefly (*tu'a*) individuals. The creation of these traditional textiles continues today, much in the same way as it has for centuries; however, Tongan women have also expanded their textile repertoire to include quilts in order to fulfill cultural expectations at significant life events including births, first birthdays, weddings, anniversary celebrations, title installations and, most commonly, at funerals or as grave decorations.

This innovation, while on the one hand representing a departure from past practices, has also served to complement rather than replace traditional Tongan practices involving textile wealth. Indeed, it is clear that women's critical role in producing textile wealth has remained central to social and economic exchange in Tonga, although in some cases the parameters of these exchanges have shifted. Cloth has remained central to the organization of social as well as political life for Tongans. The quilts, as a form of textile wealth, provide a connection between the home islands and Tongans who have migrated overseas, mostly to the United States, and a means of connecting with a Tongan identity in a traditionally based manner while also creatively claiming a unique migrant identity. This paper examines Tongan quilting and how it fits into the larger Tongan textile tradition.

### *The Kingdom of Tonga*

The islands of Tonga are part of western Polynesia, lying just east of Fiji and south of Samoa between 15° S. and 24° S. latitudes and between 173° W. and 175° W. longitudes (see figure 1). Anthropologists and archaeologists designate this region as nuclear Polynesia where over three thousand years ago people, almost assuredly from the west, settled in the area and established a cultural complex which is now known as Polynesian.<sup>2</sup> It seems clear that cloth was an important item in this cultural system from its earliest days.<sup>3</sup> From the Tongan and probably Samoan islands, intrepid Polynesian sailors and explorers set out and settled the far eastern reaches of the region—Tahiti and the Society Islands, the Marquesas, the Hawaiian Islands, Aotearoa/New Zealand, the Cook Islands, and Rapanui/Easter Island as well as many other smaller archipelagoes and islands.<sup>4</sup>



Figure 1. Western Polynesia

Over 150 islands and islets, stretched over several hundred kilometers of ocean, make up the Tongan archipelago. Historically, Tongans were renowned sailors and they have always maintained ongoing kin, social, and political ties within the archipelago as well as beyond their shores, particularly with the Samoan Islands and the Lau Islands of Fiji.<sup>5</sup> Tonga, both traditionally and contemporarily, is a hierarchical society with a complex ranking system based on gender and birth. It is often described as one of the mostly highly stratified and centralized of the Polynesian societies.<sup>6</sup> Those who are deemed “chiefly” (*eiki*) rule—traditionally in a somewhat fluid combination of sacred and ruling titled chiefs. Since 1845 that rule has been a constitutional monarchy self-proclaimed by Taufa’ahau Tupou I who, in an effort to repulse imperialistic Europeans, promulgated codes of law and, eventually, a constitution, in a western style. He also established a royal dynasty which still survives and rules Tonga today.



Tongan contact with the West began with the very brief call of a Dutch expedition in 1643, but remained fleeting and sporadic until the visits of James Cook and his crew in the 1770s. Contact with the West was intermittent in the 1780s and 1790s, but from the turn of the nineteenth century it has remained almost continuous.<sup>7</sup> Christian missionaries arrived on the islands in 1797, with a permanent Wesleyan presence established in the mid 1820s, with other Christian sects and orders arriving after this.<sup>8</sup> Today, Christianity, as expressed by a wide variety of denominations, plays a very important part in Tongan life and culture—both in the islands and in migrant communities overseas.

Emmigration from Tonga to the West, primarily to the United States, Aotearoa/New Zealand, and Australia, began in the late 1950s with significant increases in the 1960s and 1970s as western economies burgeoned and factory work was readily available for migrant workers.<sup>9</sup> It is difficult to overestimate the impact that this migration has had on Tonga—a small kingdom with a population of about 100,000. Virtually every Tongan family has some of its members living, temporarily or permanently, overseas and, at times, remittances from overseas have proved economically significant for many families. It has been estimated that by the twenty-first century more Tongans will live outside of the Kingdom, than inside its boundaries.<sup>10</sup> Most of these emigrants, however, keep close ties with family in the Islands, returning regularly for visits to the Islands when they are able and participating, even if from afar, in the significant life events of family members. Quilts have come to play an important part in fulfilling kin obligations through their presentation both in home islands and between home and overseas migrant communities of Tongan people.

### *The Introduction of Quilting in Tonga*

Tongan women have been crocheting, piecing, and quilting to produce utilitarian bedcovers for quite some time. There is some debate as to where women learned the craft and when they began quilting. It is generally agreed that quilt making was prevalent in the years following the Second World War and, most probably, that it existed to a lesser extent before the War. It is not so clear, however, where and



from whom Tongan women learned to quilt. Some Tongans contend that they were taught by Christian missionaries (American Mormon missionaries, the wives of British Wesleyan missionaries, or Catholic sisters are all mentioned as possibilities). Others credit the Peace Corps workers from the United States with their introduction. Still others believe that Tongan women learned while living overseas—the United States is most frequently mentioned as the source.

In truth, the introduction of quilting in Tonga has probably come from several sources at different times in history. The most likely of the missionary sources is the Mormon church. A permanent Mormon mission was established in Tonga in 1916 and, presumably, the female missionaries brought their quilting skills with them and taught local women as they did elsewhere in the Pacific.<sup>11</sup> This is certainly supported by the generic name, "*Kuiliti Mamonga*" ("Mormon quilts"), applied by some Tongans to the craft. It need not, however, be the sole source. Wesleyan wives accompanied their missionary husbands into the Tongan mission fields since the 1820s. Sewing was a skill they eagerly taught and it was equally eagerly learned.<sup>12</sup> There is also clear evidence that individual female Peace Corps workers, resident in the islands since the 1960s, who were also quilters, taught Tongan women their skills. Other western women who lived in the islands also influenced quilting. An Australian and New Zealand woman, for example, helped establish a quilting co-operative in the 1980s which made bed covers and cot quilts for sale. Many Tongan women living overseas, especially in Hawai'i and the Mainland U.S.A., took up quilting, and brought it back to the Kingdom during visits or when they returned to live. In addition, the local commercial bookstore regularly imports quilt books and magazines. Undoubtedly all of these sources played a role in the establishment of quilting in Tonga.

Annette B. Weiner and Jane Schneider argue that humans imbue cloth with symbolic potentials for social cohesion and political salience and that these are manifest in at least four domains of social activity.<sup>13</sup> The first is in the creation of the cloth itself and how this is perceived. The second involves human rituals surrounding and signifying life events, especially death. The third domain is in the rituals surrounding ceremonial investitures of power and authority. Clothing and personal adornment and decoration comprises the fourth domain. In con-



temporary Tonga it is possible to trace the culturally significant embodiment of quilts in the existing textile tradition by their inclusion in the first three domains as identified by Weiner and Schneider.

### *Quilts as Grave Decoration and Funerary Gifts*

The first area in which quilts appeared as more than bed linen was as grave decoration or art and as funerary gifts. As Weiner notes, women and cloth, by providing a means of descent group regeneration, play a significant part in rituals surrounding death in Polynesia.<sup>14</sup> Grave decoration is regarded as a significant and culturally valued female art form in Tonga. By decorating and caring for the grave, Tongan women show their love (*'ofa*) and respect (*fak'apa'apa*) for their deceased relation. The decoration can take on a variety of forms including the creation of a border by the placement of stones, the building of cement footings or low walls, or the careful upside down burying of beer or other bottles. Within these borders and over the entire grave, mounds of white sand or crushed coral are piled to glisten in the tropical sun. Small, black stones which have been specially oiled for the purpose, flowers, shells or other decorations are placed in and on the sand and coral. In addition, a *tapu*, a banner-like piece of cloth attached to a structure, usually made of wood, to hold it taut and upright, is erected at the head of the grave.<sup>15</sup> *Tapu* signifies something sacred or forbidden in Tongan and it is this sentiment with which Tongans regard graves and cemeteries and why the placement of *tapu* is important. The inclusion of textiles at the head of the grave as a *tapu* is a traditional practice in Tonga and reflects respect, as textiles are the quintessential form of Tongan wealth, to the deceased. Traditionally, mats, barkcloth, or "skirts" (*sisi*) made of sweet smelling flowers (*tapu kakala*) were used in their construction; however, since the 1970s quilts have been employed as grave *tapu* and as funerary gifts to appropriate family members.<sup>16</sup>

Initially, these *tapu* quilts were made by Tongan women living overseas, mostly in the United States, who found themselves unable to fulfill normal funerary expectations when a close relative died. Living away from the islands, in an environment where the raw materials for



traditional *tapu* were unavailable and often unable, usually due to financial constraints, to make the trip back to Tonga for the funeral, these migrant women created textile *tapu* by working with cloth and creating quilts.

The first quilt *tapu* were almost all pieced, patchwork quilts in traditional western star patterns, such as Blazing Star, Eight-Pointed Star, Pieced Star, Virginia Star, and, especially, the pattern often identified as the Lone Star or Morning Star. The Lone Star/Morning Star designs which feature one large star depicted across the entire quilt surface, pieced from many, small, diamond-shaped pieces, remains an enduring favorite in Tongan *tapu* quilts (see figure 2). Star design patchworks, in general, are popular for *tapu* quilts (see figure 3). The majority of the Kingdom's citizens are Christian, many devoutly so, and the biblical association of star quilts undoubtedly adds to their appeal

Figure 2. Lone Star/Morning Star patchwork quilt as grave *tapu*; Tongatapu, Kingdom of Tonga, 1999. Photograph by the author.





Figure 3. Star patchwork quilts as grave *tapu*; Tongatapu, Kingdom of Tonga, 1998. Photograph by the author.

and inclusion as *tapu*. Other traditional patchwork designs used by Tongan quilters include: Bear's Paw, Drunkard's Path, Grandmother's Flower Garden, Mariner's Compass, Monkey Wrench, and Weather-vane; although it should be noted that Tongan women rarely know or use the names of the Western patterns. An interesting twist on Tongan textiles was the inclusion of a traditional Western patchwork pattern, Grandmother's Fan on a piece of recently made Tongan barkcloth (see figure 4). In the early 1990s, puff quilts, where pieced squares are individually stuffed with a fluffy batting, became very popular as *tapu* and quilts for commemorative rituals, as the name of the deceased could be easily and distinctively spelled out with the squares making a lovely memorial piece (see figure 5).

Appliquéd designs that are executed in a Hawaiian-style appliqué, are now common in Tongan *tapu* quilts. The "Hawaiian style" is a symmetrical design achieved by folding the cloth into fourths or, sometimes, eighths before cutting layers. The overall effect is of a paper-cut snowflake. Rather than one design across the entire quilt, as is common in Hawaiian appliqué, Tongans prefer to repeat the designs in an album style (see figure 6). Tongan, unlike Hawaiian, quilts are almost



Figure 4. Patchwork design known as Grandmother's Fan used as a design on a piece of barkcloth (*ngatu*); Nuku'alofa, Kingdom of Tonga, 1999. Photograph by the author.

Figure 5. Puff quilt grave *tapu* spelling out name of the deceased; Tongatapu, Kingdom of Tonga, 1999. Photograph by the author.



Figure 6. Hawaiian-style album appliqué grave *tapu*; Tongatapu, Kingdom of Tonga, 1999. Photograph by the author.

always machine pieced, appliquéd, and quilted and do not follow the intricate quilting patterns evident in Hawaiian quilts.<sup>17</sup> Tongan innovation in appliquéd design can also be seen to be emerging in new and original asymmetrical designs.

Bright and colorful metallic fabrics are often utilized for *tapu* quilts as they add a shininess which is regarded as beautiful and pleasing in Tongan aesthetics (see figure 7). In this same vein, shiny Christmas ornaments, tinsel, or garland as well as swags of bright and ostentatious sequined, lame, velvet, or other fabric, usually reserved for night club wear in the West, are often strung up around the grave. Recently a string of electric Christmas lights was added to a grave in a cemetery in the suburbs of Nuku'alofa, the capital of Tonga. The lights gaily twinkled throughout the night. Non-Western color combinations of usually plain and always bright fabric or of white and one other color are becoming recognizable Tongan styles in *tapu* and other forms



Figure 7. Lone Star/Morning Star patchwork grave *tapu* pieced from favored metallic fabric; Tongatapu, Kingdom of Tonga, 1995. Photograph by the author.

of Tongan quilt design (see figures 8 and 9). The desire seems to be for bold, bright colors to catch the eye. The color and texture of the cloth is deemed aesthetically pleasing by Tongans and is in stark contrast to the black mourning clothes worn by relatives of the deceased.

Many of these *tapu* are, strictly speaking, bed coverlets, not quilts, because they are made of only two layers—the top design on the foundation backing, instead of several layers of cloth and batting which are sewn or quilted together. Colloquially the *tapu*, whether or not they are batted and quilted, are still called quilts. The *tapu* are left on the grave at the mercy of the weather, often until they literally fall down or fall apart (see figure 10). Even then, new *tapu* are often simply attached over the old frayed ones. This is done out of respect for the dead as well as the quiltmakers. Other women regularly refresh the *tapu* and the other grave decorations.

As with the creation of traditional Tongan textiles, the fact that the women process the cloth—in this case by cutting, piecing, stitching, and appliquéing it—thereby transforming it into something new, has



Figure 8. Pieced quilt in contrasting colors; Tongatapu, Kingdom of Tonga, 1999. Photograph by the author.

significance. Weiner and Schneider identify this as a pan-human trait with regards to cloth.<sup>18</sup> In pre-Christian, pre-monarchical Tonga, the making of barkcloth and the weaving of mats was an activity whereby the status, rank, and “essence” (*mana*) of the maker was transferred or imbued to the cloth in the creation process. In the communal barkcloth work groups this transfer and imbuing inevitably followed rank, with the cloth being “owned” by or, more accurately described as, being associated with the woman of chiefly rank who would have organized the work group. She controlled its production and its distribution.<sup>19</sup> Like the traditional textile processes, quilting embodied the maker’s status and, significantly, the maker’s relationship to the deceased in a manner relevant to them—their *’ofa* (love) and *faka’apa’apa* (respect) was clear in the cloth they constructed, even if the cloth, itself, looked different. This is most likely the reason Tongan women living overseas preferred making quilts rather than purchasing traditional mats and barkcloth which, except for the finest mats, are readily



Figure 9. Pieced quilt in contrasting colors, presented to the owner by her brother; Nuku'alofa, Kingdom of Tonga, 1999. Photograph by the author.

Figure 10. Grave *tapu* deteriorating with age; Tongatapu, Kingdom of Tonga, 1999. Photograph by the author.



available for purchase at the market in Nuku'alofa or through private sales or commissions.

These first grave quilts were not well received in Tonga. Women and men I spoke with remembered being dismayed at the lack of sensibilities towards tradition with regards to this form of grave decoration. They were shocked when the quilts, along with lengths of manufactured cloth, began appearing as *tapu* on the graves themselves in the 1970s. Twenty-five years later, however, beautifully pieced and appliquéd quilts, sometimes made in Tonga, adorn graves throughout the Kingdom; although they are still most prevalent on Tonga *tapu*. Whereas six or seven quilts might have been present in large Tonga *tapu* cemeteries in the early 1990s when I began my research; up to thirty or forty were counted in large cemeteries in 1999.

Many, if not most, of the women who were formerly shocked and dismayed, now view the quilts as attractive, durable and, hence, practical grave decorations which are entirely appropriate in the Tongan setting. The quilts are most often made by mothers, sisters, or wives of the deceased and, in some cases, were made during the lifetime of the deceased. Their inclusion as *tapu* at the grave expresses the double meaning of quilt as a form of traditional textile wealth (*koloa*) and also as a form of bed linen in the everlasting sleep of the deceased. They are clearly part of an emerging textile aesthetic in Tongan grave art.<sup>20</sup>

#### *The Ritual Presentation of Quilts*

Titles, inherited through the male line, are an important part of Tongan politics. Although having a traditional basis, since the 1876 constitution a named Tongan nobility is based around male titleholders. Part of the ritual surrounding the installation of a new titleholder involves the pounding and hydration of *kava*, a drink made from the root of the plant which is often served in Tonga at important social and political events.<sup>21</sup> In a formal *kava* ceremony, the titles of all present are called out as their cup of *kava* is brought to them. During an installation ceremony, the title is bestowed when the new holder's title is called out for the first time. This is accompanied by a presentation of goods and valuables to the highest ranking chief in a ceremony



Figure 11. Investiture ceremony (*pongipongi hingoa*) for the Tu'i Lakepa titleholder. Palace Grounds, Kolomotu'a, Kingdom of Tonga, 1993. Photograph by the author.

known as *pongipongi hingoa*. Cloth, as the acknowledged highest form of wealth, has been presented at these investiture ceremonies as long as anyone can remember. In post-Constitutional Tonga, the "highest chief" is the monarch of the Kingdom of Tonga with the titleholder coming from the ranks of named nobility.

Quilts first made their way into the *pongipongi hingoa* in the 1993 installation of the "Tu'i Lakepa" title. When the audience was seated on the grounds of the Royal Palace and the traditional *kava* circle formed, a group of women from the Tu'i Lakepa's kinship group and political supporters, entered into the grounds, holding up nearly two dozen brightly colored, machine-made quilts. The red and white banner that led the presentation of *koloa* was, in fact, a stuffed or puff quilt with the name 'Tu'i Lakepa' emblazoned on it attached to two poles for ease of movement and maximum effect for display (see figure 11).

The innovative decision to include the quilts in the presentation of traditional textile wealth was the combined effort of the mother and sister of the new titleholder. The making of the quilts by a group of Tongan women who live in the United States was organised by the





Tu'i Lakepa's sister who lived in the Los Angeles area. Her choice of quilts was based on her inability to acquire the raw materials to produce traditional mats and barkcloth in the United States as well as her aesthetic appreciation of Hawaiian quilts she had seen in Hawai'i and the mainland. Stylistically, the quilts were a mixture of pieced and appliquéd design. As with the quilt *tapu*, traditional Western patterns, Hawaiian-style appliquéd, puff quilts, and even a crocheted and appliquéd bedcover were displayed and presented.

Once again, the local Tongan reaction was not entirely positive. While most at the title installation were surprised and delighted with the textile innovation, others believed that it was not *koloa* (traditional Tongan wealth, most often in the form of mats and barkcloth)—at least not of the order of the barkcloth and mats which were also presented that day. There was also uncertainty as to whether the quilts were listed on the official inventory of *koloa* produced that day for the Palace. Most thought that it was considered as a kind of *koloa*, albeit inferior to the more traditional textiles.

Textile wealth (mats and barkcloth) was traditionally, and is still, given to those of higher rank in Tonga as a means of honoring that individual and embodying, in a material thing, the inherent inequality of the relationship between the giver and the receiver. Weiner pointed out that cloth has played such a role in investing political authority in titles and rank throughout the region.<sup>22</sup> As such, the inclusion of quilts at a title installation is culturally appropriate; cloth, even if not traditional cloth, follows rank in Tonga.

In keeping with this practice, the present monarch, H. M. King Taufa'ahau Tupou IV, was presented with an array of textile valuables when he made an official visit to the Laie campus of Brigham Young University on the island of Oahu, Hawai'i, also in 1993. Among his gifts were many quilts, most in a Hawaiian-style appliquéd, made by the local Tongan women. In this case, however, the quilts were not presented with the piles of traditional textile wealth or *koloa* during the royal *kava* ceremony, but, instead, were presented at the festivities (including feasting and dancing) which followed. The meaning to the women was obvious—while the quilts were “wealth” and were “valued” they took second place to barkcloth and mats—the traditional



forms of textile wealth. They were, in a sense, *koloa si'i* ("little" or "junior" wealth). Their junior or inferior status was clearly demarcated by their exclusion from the *kava* ceremony; although the fact that they were presented to Royalty suggests that they were still considered valuable.

Quilts are beginning to appear as presentations at other significant life events in Tongan communities. Recently in the Kingdom, for example, a dozen cot quilts were sewn and presented, in addition to traditional forms of textile wealth, to a woman at the birth of her daughter by the mother's paternal aunt (*mehekitanga*). The *mehekitanga* relationship is a very special one in Tongan society and is marked by distinct behavior and gift giving—usually to the *mehekitanga*.<sup>23</sup> Significantly, the new mother's aunt had bitterly argued with her during her pregnancy and the community believed that the quilts, given in large numbers and accompanied by traditional textile wealth, represented the aunt's public desire for reconciliation. Similarly, quilts have begun to appear among wedding presentations; again, along with more traditional forms of textile wealth. They were also displayed and presented to attending royalty in the 1997 combined celebrations marking the 50th wedding anniversary of His Majesty King Taufa'ahau Tupou IV and Queen Mata'aho and the anniversary of the founding of Tonga College.<sup>24</sup>

#### *Quilts and the Tongan Textile Repertoire*

Adrienne Kaeppler has argued that the "grammar," or underlying structure, of Tongan art in general follows a three-part conceptual organization similar to that of Tongan music with "melody or leading part (*fasi*), drone (*laulalo*), and decoration (*teuteu*)."<sup>25</sup> She developed the argument by demonstrating how the interconnecting parts function in a polyphony to emphasize the relevant features of any Tongan aesthetic or, by identifying the essential feature (through *fasi*), delimiting its spatial limitations (the function of the *laulalo* or drone), and elaborating its specific features through decoration (*teuteu*). Kaeppler demonstrated that this organising principle can be seen in the perfor-



mance of dance (*faiva*), vocal music (*hiva*), and the production and decoration of barkcloth (*ngatu*) as well as Tongan kin and gender structures.

When applied to the introduction of appliquéd or pieced quilts into a Tongan notion of wealth as property, Kaeppler's insightful analysis provides a framework for appreciating this introduction as an expansion of traditional Tongan notions of textile wealth. The quilts are encompassed within the traditional textile realm rather than perceived as a deviation from Tongan concepts. The quilts are not seen as a mere foreign influence, but rather as adhering to appropriate Tongan principles. The process is one of transformation and embellishment rather than replacement. Simply stated, the quilts do not seek to supplant or undermine the value of barkcloth or mats; instead, they can be appreciated as a decoration (*teuteu*) of traditional forms of Tongan textile wealth that enhances or shows off the beauty and craft of traditional textiles. The quilts, as previously discussed, embody many of the inherent features of traditional textiles which makes them part—a junior part—of the Tongan conception of textile wealth. Barkcloth and fine mats remain the most valuable and cherished textiles in Tonga.

This process was clearly exemplified at the presentations of quilts to the King during the title installation of the Tu'i Lakepa and also at the festivities following the Royal *kava* ceremony in Hawai'i. In both instances, the quilts were presented *in addition to*, not *in place of*, traditional forms of textile wealth. In each case, barkcloth and fine mats remained as the essential feature of the presentation; the quilts enhanced the qualities of these items by duplicating and elaborating them in a lesser or junior form—*koloa si'i*, ("little" or "junior" wealth). The quilts supported and celebrated the principal textile wealth by drawing the audience's attention to the fineness of the textiles. The quilts acted as *teuteu* ("decoration"). In neither case is it the intent of the quilts—the *teuteu*—to displace or replace the essential feature—the traditional textiles; rather they are to support their preeminence and add to their prestige. They do not disrupt the concept of "wealth" but mimic it in a form of hybridization congruent with traditional cultural ideals. The effect is one of transformation and creative play with notions of wealth as well as the enhancement of traditional values rather than one of substitution or foreign hegemony.



What is also abundantly clear in this creative adaptation of tradition is the place of the Tongan diaspora in a modern reckoning of Tongan identity.<sup>26</sup> The impetus for creating quilts as *koloa si'i* came from Tongan women living overseas, mostly in the United States. It allowed these women to participate in presentations to kin relations in Tonga in culturally appropriate ways. The cloth, manipulated and, in a sense, re-constructed by the patchwork or appliqué process, held on to the intrinsic nature and value of traditional textile wealth, while also allowing for innovation based on their modern situation. This allowed each woman to negotiate and translate her cultural identity as well as her new geographical surroundings through the traditional female domain of textiles. The quilts encompass the experience of contemporary Tongans in a modern globalized society. The hybrid textiles produced—the quilts—represent the transculture reality of Tongans today—at once traditional and modern, Tongan and Western. A combination of technology, creativity, and purpose has produced an item both unique and familiar; unique in that a clear Tongan quilt style or aesthetic is emerging, yet familiar because this quilt style fits into a traditional textile framework. In each case, migrant Tongan women could have solved their presentation dilemma through the commodification of textile wealth—they could have bought or arranged with relatives in Tonga to buy bales of barkcloth or appropriate mats. These women, however, chose to decline commodification in these cases (I am not saying they would always do this) and, instead, to reinvent how Tongan women express their identity, meet their commitments, and display their culture.

The creation of quilts and bed coverlets appeals to the aesthetics of Tongan women for a number of reasons: the colors, the juxtaposition of fabrics, and the very fact that the quilts are textiles present the possibility of a technological and ideological hybridity within Tonga notions of textile wealth. In addition, the manipulation and processing of the cloth to make it into something new is significant to the quilters. This process connects the women to the valued textile heritage of Tonga and, as Weiner points out, to the textile heritage throughout Oceania.<sup>27</sup> The fact that the quilts also celebrate kin connections overseas adds to their attraction. Quilts are assuredly part of the evolving modern textile repertoire of Tongan women. The richness and



depth of the Tongan textile heritage is reflected in the creativity and innovation that Tongan women bring to this new textile art form. Their chosen design applications and color combinations suggest an emerging Tongan style of quilting—an innovative aspect of the wealth of Tongan women's textiles.

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11. Norman Douglas, "'Unto the Islands of the Sea': The Erratic Beginnings of Mormon Missions in Polynesia, 1844–1900," *Gods Many, Visions of God*, eds. Phyllis Herda, Michael Reilly and David Hilliard (manuscript in preparation).

12. See Niel Gunson, *Messengers of Grace: Evangelical Missionaries in the South Seas, 1797–1860* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1978), 274–76; see also Bonnie Maywald, "Women of the Lotu: The Foundations of Tongan Wesleyanism Reconsidered," in *Tongan Culture and History*, 118–33.

13. Annette B. Weiner and Jane Schneider, *Cloth and Human Experience* (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1989), 3.

14. Annette B. Weiner, "Why Cloth? Wealth, Gender and Power in Oceania," in Weiner and Schneider, 63.

15. Jehanne Teilhet-Fisk, "Tongan Grave Art," in *Art and Identity in Oceania*, eds. F. Allan and Louise Hanson (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1990), 222–43; see also Adrienne Kaepler, "Me'a Fala'eiki," in *The Changing Pacific: Essays in Honour of H. E. Maude*, ed. Niel Gunson (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1978), 174–202.

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18. Weiner and Schneider, 3.

19. Herda, 153–56.

20. Teilhet-Fisk, 231–33.

21. For a discussion of the *kava* ceremony see E. E. V. Collocott, "Kava Ceremony in Tonga," *Journal of the Polynesian Society* 36 (1927): 21–47; and Elizabeth Bott, "Psychoanalysis and Ceremony: A Rejoinder to Edmund Leach," in *The Interpretation of Ritual: Essays in Honour of A. I. Richards*, ed. J. S. La Fontaine (London: Tavistock Publications, 1972), 205–37; 277–82.

22. Weiner, 62–3.

23. See Garth Rogers, " 'The Father's Sister is Black': A Consideration of Female Rank and Powers in Tonga," *Journal of the Polynesian Society* 86:2 (June 1977): 157–82.

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25. Adrienne Kaepler, "Melody, Drone and Decoration: Underlying Structures



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27. Weiner, 63.