

Toki Niu Hila: Making Tokelau adzes and identity in New Zealand

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ABSTRACT: This article examines the manufacture of a set of Tokelau toki (hafted adzes) in New Zealand. The toki are usually thought of as functional tools but they are also a medium through which the politics of relationships, knowledge transfer and cultural identity can be negotiated. This analysis focuses on cultural production processes outside the usual public forums of galleries, literature, dance and performance. The manufacture and documentation of these toki provide insights into the disjunctions of cultural meaning in transnational contexts, and considers the implications these disjunctions have for museums and their approach to authoritative ethnographic representation.

KEYWORDS: Tokelau, Tokelauans, New Zealand, adzes, toki, transnationalism, knowledge, cultural politics, cultural production, identity, ethnography.

Introduction

In 1997, the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa (Te Papa) acquired a set of toki (hafted adzes).¹ Two Tokelauan men, Kupa Kupa (aged 31) and Jack Kirifi (aged 28), made the toki in 1997 under the guidance of the late Fuli Fati, who was 80 years old at the time and had been resident in New Zealand since 1972. The toki are examples of hafted adze forms made from a combination of indigenous and non-indigenous materials. The acquisition of the toki was an opportunity for the museum to document the work of a recognised Tokelauan master craftsman, and two younger Tokelauan apprentices resident in New Zealand. The circumstances of the manufacture of these toki poses questions about why this group of men are making toki, how are doing it, and what these things mean to them.

Three authors contribute to this article. Toki makers Kupa Kupa and Jack Kirifi describe how they made toki and provide insight into their roles and relationship as toki-making apprentices. Based on written material provided by Kupa and interviews with both Kupa and Kirifi, Sean Mallon contributes an analysis of their accounts and links the discussion of them to wider anthropological discourse on cultural production, identity, transnationalism, and issues of ethnographic representation. Kupa and Kirifi revised and commented on several drafts of this article. Fuli Fati passed away in 2001 and his experiences relating to the making of the toki are unfortunately not recorded.

In the last two decades, the arts have been a popular focus for scholars interested in processes of identity formation among migrant Pacific peoples and their descendants in New Zealand. Literary and visual art forms, such as painting and sculpture, and performance genres, such as film, theatre,

music, and dance, have been the most accessible sites and cultural productions for the exploration and public expression of ethnic identity. Fashion and jewellery are two other related art forms where similar processes resonate (Lay 1996, 2002, Mallon and Pereira 2002, Stevenson 1996, Thomas 1996a, 1996b, Vercoe 1999). Other cultural productions such as ngatu (Tongan barkcloth) and tivaevae (Cook Islands quilts) have a similar significance, and are circulated and exchanged within their communities of origin both in the islands and New Zealand. They are presented at weddings and in hair cutting ceremonies, and bought and sold in shops and weekend markets. The circulation of these objects also extends to museums and art galleries, where they are collected, displayed, and sometimes sold as works of art. The manufacture and circulation of these items are activities that bring people together, preserve knowledge, and promote identification with particular ethnic or social groups (Drake 2002, Hutton 2002, Herda 2002).

In this paper, we specifically focus on toki to highlight one example of a less public and community-based context for the formation and expression of ethnic identity. We reflect on how the making of these toki can be understood as both a cultural product and a social process through which social actors are able to produce aesthetic values, ideological perspectives, and identities (Mahon 2000: 467–468). We demonstrate how identity can be constructed through, and as a result of, social and material processes and representations (Butler 1990, Besnier 1997, Myers 1994). This is significant because, unlike other cultural productions that circulate in the very public forums of exhibitions, markets, galleries and publications, less is published about how social actors negotiate identities outside the public gaze. What are the private venues, negotiations, and relationships that allow social actors to construct personal identities in smaller and less open social groups?

We approach this question from several perspectives. First, the manufacture of the toki is described, and we examine the way the makers have used this process to access information about history, lifestyle, values, and cultural practice in Tokelau. Second, we examine the relationships embedded in this process to reveal how the makers sought to bridge a generation gap between themselves and an elder, who as well as being a recognised craftsman in the community was also their grandfather. Third, we show how this transmission of information and knowledge facilitated the reproduction of

long-established and culturally defined roles, and the formation of a sense of self-identity among the makers.

Tokelauans and New Zealand

Tokelau is an archipelago of three atolls in western Polynesia just north of Samoa; the three villages, one each in Atafu, Fakaofu, and Nukunonu, currently support a population of around 1500. Since 1925, Tokelau has been under New Zealand's administration as a non-self-governing territory. However, Tokelauans have only migrated to New Zealand in significant numbers since the 1960s. Some arrived as part of settlement and scholarship schemes, and some came to New Zealand of their own accord, with the assistance of established countrymen. Tokelauans arriving in New Zealand have tended to settle in either Wellington or Auckland, with smaller communities also established in Rotorua and Taupo. From these initial migrant populations have emerged a second and third generation, born, raised, and educated in New Zealand. In 1991, the majority of Tokelauans (60%) lived in the Wellington regional area, with just over half residing in either Porirua or Lower Hutt. Many of the present generation of Tokelauans have knowledge and experience of their parents' culture only through their New Zealand-based communities. Similar to the experiences of Samoan migrants to New Zealand and their descendants (Macpherson 1984), the range of experiences of Tokelau culture and values in New Zealand vary. However, the transnational connections between Tokelauans in New Zealand and those in Tokelau are very strong, and there is a very real sense in which they form a single community (Hooper 2000: 611–612).

Tokelau material culture – Tokelau toki

The material culture of Tokelau circulates on the transnational network that comprises the contemporary Tokelau community. The importation of raw materials from Tokelau to make items in New Zealand is common. Timber, coconut fibre, processed pandanus for weaving, and ready-made items such as tuluma and pearlshell ornaments are regularly travelling with migrants from, and return visitors to, Tokelau.

With the exception of Gordon Macgregor's (1937) *Ethnology of Tokelau*, little is published on the material culture of Tokelau. Anthropologists Judith Huntsman and Antony Hooper's book *Tokelau: A historical ethnography* (1996) offers insight into the institutions and social struc-

tures in which objects are embedded, and Huntsman has also produced an unpublished paper on Tokelau valuables (Huntsman n.d.). Unfortunately, there is no material culture study for Tokelau along the same lines as Gerd Koch's classic work on Tuvalu (1984) and Kiribati (1986), and Te Rangi Hiroa's (Peter Buck) on Samoa (1930).

However, there are some useful Tokelau material culture collections in New Zealand museums. In a survey in the late 1970s and early 1980s of Pacific collections in New Zealand museums, the holdings and distribution of Tokelau material culture collections was established (Neich, 1982). The most notable holding is in the Auckland Institute and Museum. Its collection comprises over 95 objects acquired by Hooper and Huntsman during the course of their fieldwork in Tokelau during the 1970s. Provincial museums such as Otago and Canterbury had 42 and 24 items respectively. At the time of the survey, Te Papa had 16 items. Presently, the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa has over 160 items from Tokelau, although there are many duplicate objects; for example, 43 necklaces – all very similar. Te Papa also has examples of things made by Tokelauans in New Zealand, including a kie tau ceremonial mat and a high-fashion garment.² The holdings of Tokelau toki in Te Papa's collection include several small examples of hafted toki with shell blades as well as some loose shell blades.

The coral atolls of Tokelau offer no stone for the manufacture of adzes and other woodworking tools. Before extensive European contact, adze blades were usually made from the shell of the *tridacna*, a large species of clam. Toki hafted with these shell blades were used in the manufacture of vaka (canoes) and other wooden articles such as tuluma (wooden fishing boxes) and kumete (bowls). Occasionally, stone blades were acquired from Samoa and brought back by Tokelauan seafarers. Ethnologist Gordon Macgregor mentions two examples of toki collected in the course of his 1932 fieldwork as being made from material not indigenous to Tokelau (Macgregor 1937: 153). Archaeological excavations in Tokelau undertaken by Simon Best in 1986 have also uncovered several examples of adze blades made from shell (Best 1988). Metal blades have been utilised since the first encounters with Europeans. The durability and greater effectiveness of metal made it a sensible and popular choice among carvers simply because it made life easier.

The archaeological and ethnographic record for the wider Pacific shows us that adze and axe blades have long been a form of wealth and utilised as a gift and valuable

in trade and exchange (see Malinowski 1922: 354, Sillitoe 1988: 45, Kirch 1984: 46, Te Rangi Hiroa 1934: 133). Since the first encounters with Europeans adzes have also been made to satisfy the interest of European tourists and collectors. Tokelauans in New Zealand make toki to ensure the continuation of Tokelau crafts, as well as for work around their homes and workplaces. These toki have wooden handles and steel blades, and are bound together with nylon fishing line and stretched and tightly bound strips of tyre rubber. One Tokelauan living in Auckland has made and used toki to construct small scale replica canoes (Jeff Evans, pers. comm.) and toki are also commonly used to carve wooden tuluma (fishing tackle boxes) from local or imported timber.

Making Tokelau toki – Niu Hila (New Zealand) style

Although timber is sometimes imported from Tokelau to make tuluma and other small items, the material (apart from the lashing fibre) for making the toki described here were sourced in New Zealand. Kupa and Jack purchased steel pipe and chisels for the blades, and looked for timber for the adze handles locally. Jack recalls that the process of collecting the material was very important to them in establishing a relationship of trust with Fuli. He says, 'We felt it was important to find and collect the materials for ourselves so our grandfather knew we were serious about the task, although this followed an initial search with Fuli who taught us what to look for.' The search for potential adze handles often involved three-hour treks into environments where Kupa and Jack could find suitable fallen trees.

While there was a concern with recreating a distinctive Tokelau toki, there was also a desire to make toki that Kupa and Jack felt were distinctively their own. Fuli was open minded about this and was more concerned that the tool was lashed correctly and its structure was intact. Each toki is comprised of three parts: the kau toki (adze handle), the lau toki (blade) and the lau kafa (lashing). In the following paragraphs, Kupa Kupa describes the manufacturing process.

Kau toki (the adze handles)

The selection of the branch to make the kau toki is a careful and deliberate process. Only branches that show the potential to be shaped into one of the required kau toki are selected. It is not just a case of cutting any branch and trying to fashion



Fig. 1. Unworked adze handles. Photograph by Jan Nauza.

a handle from it. In the selection of the branch, allowance is given for extra length and width. If, during the shaping process, the mistake is made of cutting too deep into the wood or removing too much, then the extra allowance enables corrections to be made without wasting a potentially good branch.

The kau toki were selected from tree branches that diverged on angles between 45 and 90 degrees. This was to take advantage of the natural strength found in the fusion where one branch forks off from another. The kau toki were fashioned from branches cut from trees that had fallen naturally, or from driftwood found along the local coastline. All but one of the kau toki are from branches of the willow tree, the remaining driftwood pieces were not identified but selected on the basis of durability and condition. There are no specified measurements when creating the dimensions of the kau toki. The crucial requirement is that they be either short or long enough to allow for a comfortable grip and to practically serve their purpose.

After selecting a branch with the right angle, an assessment is made to decide which end will form the handle and which end will hold the blade. It is not a matter of picking any end; time and resources are wasted if, after completing the toki, it is found that as a tool it doesn't carve effectively. A branch can be thick when it is first cut from a tree, but once it starts to be shaped it quickly becomes smaller. When the handle is shaped, it is important that the inner angle (or axil) where the branch forks is not cut into by any tool. As this area will absorb much of the force from the pounding motion when using the toki, even a small cut made in this area will cause it to crack. This crack will gradually increase in size, eventually rendering the kau toki ineffective. When

preparing the flat surface for the blade to rest in, there should be just enough space to accommodate half the actual length of the blade.

Lau toki (the blade)

Historically, toki blades were made from cut clamshells, but for the New Zealand toki, steel blades were used. Originally, clamshell from Tokelau was sought for use in making this set of toki. Unfortunately, restrictions on the importation of endangered species prohibited it from being used in New Zealand.

With the exception of one type of toki, the toki koko, the steel blades selected for use in making the toki were flat. Each blade was cut to fit neatly on the prepared surface of the handle. The sharpened edge of the blade is positioned on top. The blade is sharpened and ground into shape using a stone-grinding machine. For the toki koko (curved toki blades), metal pipes that were round in section were cut in half and sharpened. The very sharp corners of the sharpened edges called 'kina' were carefully cut away. This makes a crucial difference to how much wood is removed in each stroke of the carving action, and how neatly this is done. This is particularly important when carving detailed areas.

Lau kafa (coconut fibre lashing)

Making lau kafa used to bind the blade to the handle is a time-consuming task. The raw dried coconut fibres used to make lau kafa were imported to New Zealand from Tokelau. The fibre required for the toki was taken from the inner husk of specific types of mature coconuts. When enough suitable coconuts are husked, the husks are soaked in the lagoon, held down by rocks or other large heavy materials. The fibrous husks remain submerged for up to three months before being removed for processing.

After the fibres of the coconut husks are rinsed thoroughly in fresh water, they are put out in the sun to dry. Later they are cleaned, in order to produce the long smooth fibre lengths that will become the lau kafa. A few strands (amo) of fibre are separated at a time, rolled on the thigh and joined, and then braided together using a technique called 'tupe lau tolu', which produces a three-ply braid that is flat but tightly bound together. The lashing of the blade to the haft requires a technique that ensures that the blade is held securely to the handle. It also creates a design in the overlaying of the fibre that is practical but also tidy and aesthetically pleasing.³



Fig 2. The complete Toki set named:

- a Toki-honihoni (FE11344)
- b Toki-hila (FE11346)
- c Toki-koko (FE11349)
- d Toki-ualoa (FE11351)
- e Toki-ualoa (FE11353)
- f Toki-ualoa (FE11352)
- g Toki-hila (FE11345)
- h Toki-honihoni (FE11348)
- i Toki-koko (FE11350)
- j Toki-koko (FE11347)

Toki-honihoni

A small adze used for carving detailed areas of a vaka, such as the floor and lower ends of the sides of a vaka that are generally difficult to reach when using the bigger toki with longer handles. It is also used to carve and shape the insides of tuluma.

Negotiating relationships

A significant part of the toki-making process was the opportunity it provided for Kupa and Jack to work with their grandfather Fuli Fati. Fuli was well respected and enjoyed a prominent and influential role in community affairs, despite living in New Zealand. The wider Tokelau community regularly consulted him on a wide range of matters. People often travelled from throughout New Zealand to seek his assistance and advice. They would consult him on issues of land ownership in Tokelau, the construction of 'vaka', and general aspects of Tokelau custom and traditions.

Toki-hila

A large adze used to carve the body or hulls of the vaka

Toki-koko

An adze with a curved blade used for shaping out the rounded base of wooden bowls and the interior base of canoes.

Toki-ualoa

A long handled adze used for carving the areas difficult to access with other adzes for example, deep wooden bowls, and the interior 'V' sides of a vaka.

Parts of the toki:

- Kau toki (adze handle)
- Lau toki (the blade)
- Lau kafa (lashing)

Photograph by Jan Nauta

There is a Tokelau saying 'He toaina ke nofo i te muli vaka' ('an elder to sit at the stern of the canoe'). This acknowledges the wise counsel and trusted guidance of an elder and the utmost importance of having an elder present as protector. In this regard, Fuli was often called upon to guide, oversee, and represent Tokelau people and communities at a local and national level. These occasions included national sporting and cultural events, Government meetings, and affairs in the Tokelau Islands. Fuli was also recognised as a healer of physical illness, and of illness attributed to supernatural phenomena.

In many Polynesian languages, the term tufuga/tohunga refers to an expert or specialist skilled in a task or

set of related tasks. Within certain activities, such as hunting and fishing, tattooing, and house and canoe building, highly skilled individuals specialise in, oversee, and control aspects of the work. In some island-based cultures, special rituals and ceremonies mark different stages of these activities. The presentations made to these experts for their work can include valuables and food or cash. This form of payment often amounts to a massive commitment of resources from the commissioning party.⁴

Historically, in other parts of the Pacific, the organisation of some specialised trades resembled the formal arrangements of the European apprentice and guild system (Goldman 1970:255). Individuals with an aptitude and talent for a particular activity would attach themselves to a tufuga associated with that specialist craft. In the apprentice role, an individual learns the necessary skills under expert tutelage. In Tokelau, the kind of knowledge possessed by the individuals known as tufuga or specialist in other places is acknowledged as being the preserve of the older generation of men who arbitrate and make decisions on behalf of the village. Some elders, like Fuli Fati, have become iconic figures in their migrant community, represent Tokelau culture, and are widely perceived as guardians or custodians of cultural knowledge. According to Huntsman and Hooper, those entrusted with 'steering' the village and who are responsible for the villages' safety are the toaina (elders/old men). They remark that:

An elder, if present, is the spokesperson in even the most casual gathering. For example, it is almost impossible to elicit any information about any aspect of Tokelau life (or anything else for that matter) from a younger person if older ones are present. All questions are simply referred to them.... The etiquette of respect requires a person entering an elder's presence, to approach quietly, to sit formally with crossed legs, and to remain silent until spoken to.... Elders are continually being consulted, asked permission, appraised of intentions by others, who are seeking approval and sanctions of their plans (1996: 46–47).

In New Zealand, similar protocols apply, and this creates difficulties for the passing on of knowledge in an environment where there is little relevance for the customary use of that knowledge. Due in part to the language barrier, Jack talks of his feeling of nervousness/respect when approaching elders, especially in formal contexts. In fact, as a younger person, you are expected to say very little at all. Even informally, there is great pressure to act appropriately, use the correct language, and find the right vocabulary to express yourself. Jack says,

'The respect thing is good, it's important, you can't get too close. This was the same for my parents' generation.' Kupa and Jack's approach to Fuli was conditioned by a lifetime of living within these cultural expectations, but family ties created a useful link across the generation gap.

Kupa first approached Fuli about the possibility of making toki. The idea and inspiration came when Kupa was visiting Fuli and noticed that he was working on a large 'tuluma' (tackle box) with a toki, carving it from a section of pine. Kupa had never seen a toki being used before that day, and was fascinated on this occasion. Previously, Kupa had undertaken learning sessions with Fuli that had focused mainly on genealogy and family history. Prior to making the toki, Kupa found himself becoming restless and needing something more 'hands on' and practical to work on. Seeing the toki being used inspired him to pursue the art of toki making.

It was convenient that Fuli was Kupa's grandfather. However, Kupa considered that just because he was one of many mokopuna (grandchildren) it did not mean that his grandfather would agree to teach him the making of toki. As well as the protocols related to respect, intergenerational differences and restrictions relating to access to, and control of, knowledge can often create communication barriers. However, in this case, Kupa and Jack did not experience this difficulty.

The politics of knowledge

Over many years since his childhood, Kupa had become familiar with Fuli's attitudes and personality. He made it known to Fuli from a very early age (11 years) that he had an interest in Tokelau history, arts, and crafts. After school, Kupa would visit Fuli's house, knowing that he would be sitting outside working on an art or craft project. After sitting with Fuli regularly, it seemed to Kupa that Fuli gradually expected him to be there each day. Initially, Kupa just watched Fuli working on making something, but after some time he eventually asked if he could help. Kupa soon found he was less a spectator than a pupil. Together over a period of 20 years they completed various projects, including the making of kaho (mother of pearl shell pendants), heu (scoop nets), kupega (fishing nets), and afa (netting gauges) and hika (netting needles).⁵

Through his childhood and into his teens, Kupa came to learn and accumulate a wealth of information about genealogy and family history. When Kupa asked Fuli to teach

him how to make toki, his grandfather was more than willing to show him. Due to the long relationship they had enjoyed over the years, Kupa found himself in a privileged position of trust. This was an important aspect of the relationship because, according to Kupa, Fuli would often say that many of the things he was about to teach him were things that few other Tokelauans knew. Kupa recalls that, although Fuli was a very loving grandfather, he was careful about the things that he would teach and to whom. Kupa was under the impression that certain knowledge was to be kept within the family, if not kept to himself.

Secrecy is a familiar shroud that often obscures the work of cultural producers in the Pacific. For example, in Tokelau fishing, knowledge relating to the finer points of technique, the selection of baits, and the handling of currents was very closely guarded and usually only taught at sea in a 'hands on' context (Hooper 1985: 19). In Māori and Samoan cultures, the work-sites of tufuga are often restricted in terms of access to the work-site as well as the knowledge. Specific details of the work are protected. In the case of making the toki and working with Fuli, there were several reasons for this kind of secrecy. One reason, Kupa explains, is that Fuli detested a person who was 'fakamaualuga', literally someone making out to be greater than they actually are. Fuli, in his role as teacher and senior figure, taught humility and respect to all his children and mokopuna. He knew well that knowledge could be used to someone's advantage to elevate themselves to a higher social status, without having earned this through the appropriate channels. It is frowned upon to act 'fakamaualuga' and most Tokelauan people are very familiar with the social stigma associated with this type of behaviour. Fuli was careful about passing on his 'gifts', partly because he didn't want to risk people being misinformed. Neither did he want any person using information for their personal gain. According to Kupa, Fuli's explanation for most things was based on Christian beliefs. Kupa says that Fuli believed that every person receives a gift from God that they may use to help others. Thus Fuli was open to the idea that his gifts of knowledge could be passed on to someone he trusted. Jack reminds us that projects and other similar activities are often kept secret until they are almost complete. 'You know how it is...' he says. Restrictions are put in place partly to keep specialist knowledge and techniques secret and confined to certain people or roles but also to protect the progress and direction of activities (and those involved) from outside interference.

While working on projects, Fuli would carefully scrutinise Kupa and Jack's workmanship and would critique their technique and attitude. He encouraged speed with learning, and emphasised repetition for information retention. Jack remembers the sessions extending over a morning or afternoon, for several hours, once or twice a week for several months. Fuli demanded absolute focus on the task at hand because he knew that learning could be both an exciting, rewarding experience and a boring one if the tasks were too lengthy. Fuli would often stop them in their work and insist they take a break. Gradually, Fuli expected detail and accuracy from his apprentices so that, whatever the project, the work done conformed to 'na aho kua leva' – the old ways as he had learned. Fuli made it clear that while there are those elders that have specialised knowledge, there are also those that are 'toeaina tauanoa' – just elderly with not much to offer in terms of knowledge. Kupa says Fuli was sympathetic toward people of the younger generation who sought 'ancient' knowledge. This was partly because he had spent a lifetime accumulating this knowledge. This was not because he wanted to know certain things, but because it was part of everyday living and a means of survival. Kupa recalls that Fuli was inspired to share his knowledge because he felt a sense of loss, with the passing away of so many Tokelau elders and the experiences and memories they took with them. In migrant and diasporic communities, a sense of loss can fuel the desire to cling to cultural attributes that are distinctive. There is a degree of agency in what people discard and transform, and how they go about doing this.

As the project proceeded, Fuli instructed his apprentices on the function and purpose of the toki. He told stories explaining how to obtain and use the materials in Tokelau, describing their scarcity, and discussing what compromises can be made in the manufacturing process. He sought to demonstrate the place of the item within the Tokelau culture, and to locate the object in a cultural context of use as well as manufacture. Through teaching, Fuli could demonstrate and share his knowledge and relate some of his experiences to his students. Fuli was also flexible and open to new ideas, and allowed his students to express themselves in their work and innovate. Part of the process of manufacturing the toki was customising and making use of the materials that were readily available. Fallen willow trees near a local stream provided wood for the handles and steel chisels and pipe were used to make the blades. There were also attempts to innovate and signify creative ownership in the making of



Fig 3. Fuli Fati, Fakaofu, Tokelau c. 1970s. Photograph courtesy Kupa Kupa.

the toki. Jack draws our attention to the incorporation of small decorative elements such as notches or accentuated curves in the wooden handles, so that each toki is slightly personalised and the identity of the maker distinguishable. This opportunity for innovation highlights Fuli's attitude to innovation not only in the materials used but also in interpretation of the toki's form. However, it reveals a strange contradiction, because, while Fuli expected his apprentices to conform to the 'na aho kua leva' the old ways as he had learned, he perhaps saw the old ways as being not altogether about *what* was being made, but *how* it was being made. This suggests that Fuli had less concern with trying to live up to an image of an idealised past, which can easily be seen as a more legitimate and 'authentic' way to be.

Having completed a toki each, conforming to 'na aho kua leva', Kupa and Jack often discussed adding a flair of creativity to the remaining toki they had yet to make, without compromising the effectiveness of the toki as a tool. They proceeded to incorporate simple designs into the toki they made, as they saw the manufacturing process as an art form, not just as an exercise in making a tool. Kupa and Jack explained to Fuli that they wanted to 'teu' (decorate) the toki so that it would be an object pleasing to look at and admire. Fuli's response to this was simple, 'e manaiā' (it looks nice). Fuli's sureness and confidence in his teaching and approach reinforces his role as a master craftsman and elder and demonstrates his ability to apply his skills and knowledge in a new situation. For Fuli, the materials available to him in the present could be the ideal and just as authentic as those



Fig 4. Fuli Fati making a fishing net. Photograph by Norman Heke.

of the past. He was less interested in achieving 'cultural authenticity' in materials because that authenticity was more significantly embedded in other aspects of the work.

Experts skilled in vaka building, fishing, and seafaring will have limited opportunities to employ their skills in a New Zealand urban context.⁶ While many Tokelau men could apply their knowledge of fishing in Tokelau equally well in New Zealand, the social organisation behind such fishing expeditions may not be as formalised or structured as in Tokelau. Likewise, the values and significance of the 'fishing trip' may not be the same. However, this doesn't mean that specialist knowledge from island situations cannot be transported and applied elsewhere. For example, individuals specialising in more portable forms of knowledge such as indigenous medicine and healing are often consulted for their advice and expertise outside the village context. Comparable data shows experts in other fields actively working abroad and internationally.⁷



Clockwise from above left:

Fig 5. Shaping the handles (Kupu Kupu, Jack Kirifi, Fuli Fati, Pouturu, New Zealand 1997). Photograph by Jan Nauru.
Fig 6. Assembling the adzes. Photograph by Norman Heke.

Fig 7. Lashing the adze blade with coconut fibre cord. Photograph by Norman Heke.



Making toki – making meanings

The making of toki provide a useful case study for the way negotiations of identity and place are occurring in material forms and cultural productions that don't circulate in the public domain. Unlike many forms of literature, and visual and performing arts, the toki are not for presentation to a particular audience. They are not destined for a commercial market, to advance a particular point of view, or to make overt social or political commentary. Debates around gender, ethnic, class, and national and sexual identities are often embedded in the very public expressions of art, literature, and performance; however, the same debates are also found in art forms and productions not so prominently in the public gaze.

We privilege the toki in this case study because they are an example of a group of objects outside the more accessible visual and textual forms. Their manufacture draws

attention to alternative venues and processes through which cultural values and ethnic identities can be expressed. Toki, like other cultural productions created by ethnic minorities, can be used in '...the mediation of ruptures of time and history – to heal disruptions in cultural knowledge, historical memory, and identity between generations...' (Ginsburg 1991: 104).

When the manufacture of the toki was first initiated, the intention to make 'traditional' replicas entirely from indigenous material was paramount. This was because acquiring the 'authentic' materials would reflect the makers' cultural competency and the 'authenticity' of the objects they were making. It is true that the value and significance of the toki can be partly found in the materials from which they were made. The value attached to materials often affects the value attached to things, but they are not the same (Friedel: 1993: 46). It may seem that the use of steel blades and willow branches in the final product compromised the desire for 'au-

thenticity'. However, this disappointment was transcended when the process of manufacture, and the relationship and other benefits this entailed, became more significant than the materials used to make the toki. In making the toki, the significance of the materials was not intrinsic to them but was ascribed by the makers. Yet working with and lashing the 'authentic' Tokelau lau kafa (coconut fibre) instead of synthetic fishing line offered a tangible and tactile cultural connection that somehow brought Tokelau and Tokelau's past closer to the present.

The process of making toki offered the benefits of relationship and knowledge acquisition. For Kupa and Jack, knowledge about Tokelau lifeways and values generated a sense of belonging and an identification with the Tokelauan culture from which they derived. As Kupa and Jack worked with the materials and came to appreciate the skills required to make toki, they also learnt about the Tokelau context for its use and manufacture. For Kupa and Jack, to use a thing, or in this case make a thing, in a culturally appropriate way became a way of experiencing culture directly – becoming part of the medium of signs that constitutes that culture (Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton 1981: 51). This process has social benefits for Kupa and Jack, because possessing this knowledge demarcates them (as makers) from those that do not. It imbues them with a form of cultural capital that gives them power and leverage (Bourdieu 1984: 114–115, Lash 1993: 197). This capital locates them within a social position and sets them on a social trajectory that ultimately has more meaning and value than merely possessing a toki on its own.

In this way, the toki can be understood as both a material and symbolic production. In the context described here, the functional value of the toki as a tool is less important than its symbolic value. The toki becomes symbolic of a set of relationships, as well as the transmission of knowledge. Fuli's selection of his apprentices, as well as his teaching methods, added value to the knowledge of toki making. A sense of identity for Kupa and Jack was generated through the acquisition of this knowledge. Kupa and Jack were not seeking to make the adzes to build a vaka or a tuluma. Rather they were invested in initiating a relationship with the master craftsman, their grandfather, and in receiving knowledge that would inform and allow them to create a sense of self or who they thought they should be. In the acquisition of this knowledge, they were seeking to become more closely connected to their heritage and values they considered more Tokelauan

than non-Tokelauan. In this situation, cultural knowledge becomes the basis for ethnic recognition and allows for the preservation of cultural boundaries and (in this case) familial relationships. As Kupa said of the experience:

I had gained a strong sense of identity within this role as a student. This is because Fuli served as a valuable link in my efforts not only to learn aspects of Tokelau arts and crafts, but also in my search to understand who I was as a Tokelauan living in New Zealand. My learning sessions with Fuli have revealed many things about him as a person, but also about myself. These sessions satisfied my longing to learn about who I was and where I originally came from. Fuli had a natural tendency to empower me with knowledge that was special because it was knowledge that not every other Tokelau person had the privilege to gain.

And Jack:

You can learn to make the toki, but the person you learn from makes a difference, the relationship might be different. It was a humbling experience, and the experience was the essence. By making the toki I have come to appreciate more the things that I took for granted – the hardships of our parents. It was a step back for me, getting away from the rat race, it was a treasured time.

Finding a role – reclaiming the past

The manufacture of toki to facilitate the transfer of knowledge and the exploration of cultural identity is not an isolated occurrence. As mentioned earlier, identities are negotiated through other forms of cultural production among Pacific Island people in New Zealand, most notably in the visual arts, performance, fashion, and jewellery. Closely related to the Tokelau toki are developments among some contemporary New Zealand Māori artists, who have become recognised for their skills in the making of Māori toki and other wood-working tools.⁸ We want to mention one Māori toki maker here to highlight the significance of the toki-making process in another cultural context. Like Kupa and Jack, some Māori toki makers are not necessarily interested in making the toki for building, but rather to recover specialised knowledge and skills through constructing them.

Māori toki maker Anaru Rondon, in a reference to his interest in things of the past, has been described as living 'between the worlds of yesterday and today' (Tamarapa 2002: 154). As someone living in the postcolonial present, Rondon often felt he did not fit into the mainstream New Zealand system and that he was culturally isolated from the Māori system. Through making toki and collaborating

with other artists experimenting in the same adze-making technology, Rondon has been able to reconstruct some sense of cultural identity and belonging. In his interview, Rondon refers to the psychological aspects involved in making toki. He speaks of the physical challenges of the process and the strong spirit or *wairua* that is part of the labour intensive task, claiming that the 'mahi' (work) and the materials used are imbued with this spirit (Tamarapa 2002:158). In regard to relationships, Rondon speaks of the 'face to face' nature of the manufacturing process that is important when he is teaching other people. In passing on his knowledge, he emphasises the 'physical, spiritual, and intellectual' relationships of the exchange between teacher and student (cited in Tamarapa 2002: 158). This was also an important element in Kupa and Jack's experience.

If the sole purpose of making a toki is to eventually use it to shape timber, then there are less arduous and less time-consuming methods of acquiring a suitable adze or tool. So what lies behind the motivation to make toki and engage in such a labour-intensive and difficult task? The process of working with materials such as stone, wood, and fibre, and understanding their qualities, strengths, and weaknesses offers social and cultural benefits. Part of the attraction and interest lies in working with the materials that people from the past (in this case, toki-making ancestors) would have worked with. Knowledge of, and mastery over, these materials brings the past and a more 'authentic' way of life closer to the present. In some cases, contemporary artists have developed a high level of skill in making these tools, and in time they themselves have become representative of a 'traditional' skill set – masters of the tools and their manufacture in their own right. The value of these meanings and the process of the knowledge exchange is given visibility when the toki is complete.

In this way, the materials and manufacturing process become symbolic of an idealised past, a way of life distant geographically or, in the case of Māori, considered lost, as part of the process of colonisation. In this process of recovery, they create a tangible link to the past and are able to rediscover or lay claim to a cultural or ethnic identity.

In the making of Tokelau and Māori toki, the acquisition of new skills creates a 'politics of knowledge and ignorance' that reinforces specific relationships and roles between those who possess knowledge and those who do not (Appadurai 1986: 57). The individual becomes cultural producer, expert, *tufuga*, and artist. The meaning and signifi-

cance of making toki reconfigures it (the toki) in a symbolic order, and the process of making of the toki reproduces a social ordering of relationships, specifically those of power and hierarchy relating to knowledge.⁹ In this case of making toki, knowledge itself and the relationships formed as part of the exchange are more important than the toki as an object. In reference to the importance of the relationship between master and apprentice, Jack said of Fuli that 'It could have been anything, but not anybody.' This indicates that the choice of particular object or thing to be made is arbitrary.

Conclusion

By describing the making of Tokelau toki in New Zealand, we hope to draw attention to how cultural productions can mediate social action and facilitate processes of cultural exchange and the formation of cultural values and identities (Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton 1981, Csikszentmihalyi 1993, Besnier 1997, Marcus and Myers 1995: 31, Myers 1994). It is widely understood that identity is almost unfixable. Indeed, there are no universally accepted criteria for what constitutes a successful search for identity (Novitz 1989: 286). However, social actors often temporarily seek out, latch on to and create self-expressions of identity in order to make sense of the particular circumstances, and social and cultural situations, they find themselves in.

Inspired by contemporary understandings of gender and sex identity (Butler 1990, Besnier 1997), which insist that identity at large is constructed by a variety of processes, including social, material, and cultural relationships, hierarchies, representations, and transactions – we hope to have argued that identity emerges as an outcome of a performative process, or processes of making and/or doing things. The toki makers' sense of their own ethnic identity does not precede their practice. It is through what they do that they create themselves. This is not to privilege toki making as the only process through which identity can be constructed, but rather to see it as one example of a process (and a context) that is less publicly accessible and under-documented.

If ethnic identity can be determined by a conformity to or with a shared set of cultural ideas, then craft making like other cultural productions such as dance and performance help maintain and give shape to these ideas. People tend to want to hold on to distinctive cultural attributes because they are what demarcates them from others and makes them distinctive. Cultural productions often bind

similar people together with a collective voice or interest, and can reflect a sense of a collective history or experience.

For material culture studies and related disciplines interested in the social processes that help shape and create identity, it is worth considering the way material representations not only symbolise these ideas but facilitate and create the processes in which a sense of identity is an outcome. In this specific context, the function of these toki is not just to carve and shape timber, but to help carve and shape a sense of identity, one that connects and empowers the individual socially. In the same way that Fuli developed his skills shaping vaka hulls and making fishing boxes and other tools as a young man, and subsequently carved for himself a role in his island community, his grandsons Kupa and Jack have developed their skills fashioning toki and creating roles and identities for themselves in their migrant community.

The creation of the toki and the significance they are given by the makers reveal alternatives for interpreting the cultural productions of Pacific peoples in New Zealand (compare Anita Herle 2002: 246). This is particularly important for curators and interpreters of Pacific cultures in museums. As objects circulate and are recontextualised across a transnational context, anthropologists, museum curators, and other researchers should be more aware of the meanings that don't necessarily circulate in the more public contexts and media. Venues both public and private require consideration as sites where people meet and negotiate their differences, similarities, and mutual interdependence (O' Neal 1999: 224). In the museum context, it is convenient for curators working with Pacific material culture to be guided in their interpretations by accounts of how cultural productions were used in other places and times. It is often convenient to pick up an island-based ethnographic text. To what extent should we rely on material culture studies based in the islands to understand the significance of the same material produced in contemporary New Zealand? While these sources establish a benchmark for comparison, we have to be careful to generate local ethnographic and documentary accounts of the meaning of things. If an object's value is dependent on context, we cannot assume homogeneity in an increasingly transnational world. In the absence of local ethnography, curators have to be cognisant not only of the connections but also the disjunctions between the spaces where objects originate and circulate and the meanings people give to and make through them in new locations.

Postscript

Since making the toki, Kupa and Jack have joined other Tokelauan men and have begun construction of an outrigger vaka. In this endeavour they have received a great deal of community support, especially since Fuli passed away in 2001. Elder men from the community have been invited to visit the work site and with other younger members of the Tokelau community have offered words of encouragement. The progress is also being monitored by people in the Tokelau islands indirectly and through word of mouth. There is a regular dialogue between Tokelauans in New Zealand and those in Tokelau. Word of events or projects perceived as being of benefit to Tokelau tend to draw widespread attention. The acquisition of the toki by the museum and the subsequent initiation of a project to build a vaka created a broader interest and awareness in the work that Kupa and Jack had been doing. The revelation of their interests and achievements within the public domain created a new role and identity for Kupa within the local Tokelau community. Kupa has taken on a leading role in the vaka building project. He says that while he can never replace his grandfather he can act as the facilitator to enable the group to maintain their vision.

I have already committed myself to sharing the knowledge that was gifted to me. I have made a start by continuing with the vaka project. This is in the face of extreme sense of loss with the passing on of Fuli Fati. The Tokelau culture is no doubt unique, despite various references to our culture being similar to other Pacific Island cultures especially from those islands that are closest to us, such as Samoa, Tuvalu, and the Northern Cook Islands. When I reflect on the arts that I have been taught I realise that although there are similarities with other island groups, there are also significant differences that set us apart even from our closest neighbours.

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Endnotes

- 1 The adzes' museum registration numbers are FE011344 to FE011353.
- 2 The kie tau incorporates processed pandanus from Tokelau as well as synthetic material from car packing cases. It was made by members of Ko Fatu Paepape o Lower Hutt in 1991 (Museum registration number FE10246). The fashion garment was made by Safata Atoni Lapana, and was the winner of the contemporary/traditional category at the first ever Tokelau fashion event, Lakei Tokelau, held in Porirua in November 2000 (Museum registration number FE011598/1).
- 3 Two of the toki ualoo in this set are lashed with clear synthetic fishing line.
- 4 In Samoa, house and canoe building in particular have histories of groups or guilds having their own trademarks, conventions, and standards (Te Rangi Hiroa 1930: 84–90). In some instances in Samoa, the apprentice/master relationship continues today, although it is much less formalised. Some specialist roles continue to find a necessary and respected place in some Pacific societies, with tufuga carrying titles or being associated with particular families. However, the cash economy and introduced products have rendered some tufuga roles and crafts obsolete, as customary tools and utensils are now easily replaced by imported and mass-produced alternatives. Tufuga who have moved from the village context to overseas locations have found new roles or relinquished their roles altogether.
- 5 A completed scoop net was presented to Te Papa during its official opening day on 14 February 1998 by the Tokelau performing group Matagi Pikifatu (Museum registration number FE011158).
- 6 Three recent vaka-building projects include one among the Nukunonu community of the Hutt Valley in Wellington, a small scale effort in Auckland, and a project recently initiated by Kupa Kupa and his group in Porirua during the development of this paper.
- 7 Samoan tufuga, for example, have found a demand for their customary services in Samoan communities outside Samoa. In New Zealand, a tufuga faifale (expert house builder) has built two Samoan fale (one of the fale is the PlaNet Pasifika research fale built in the Museum of New Zealand 1997) and is being sought by a third United States-based client to build another. Similarly, Samoan tufuga tatatau (tattooing experts) are also regularly working in New Zealand, Australia, Hawai'i, the United States, and Europe tattooing Samoans and non-Samoans. And Maori waka tohunga are building waka (canoes) in Hawai'i and sharing their knowledge in associations such as the Polynesian Voyaging Society.
- 8 These individuals include Wiremu Puke and Warren Warbrick.
- 9 In regard to power and knowledge, it is significant to note the authority and objectivity of Kupa's account of how the toki is made. It is a very general account and proscriptive in its tone.

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