

Polyvocal Tongan barkcloths: contemporary ngatu and nomenclature at the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa

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ABSTRACT: The Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa (Te Papa) collects and exhibits Tongan barkcloth (ngatu) to illustrate curatorial narratives about Pacific peoples in New Zealand. I discuss the materiality and provenances of five ngatu at Te Papa, their trajectories into the museum's Pacific Cultures collection and, where relevant, how they have been exhibited. I consider the role of Tongan curators and communities in determining how, when and which ngatu will enter the collection, and how Tongan identity will be imaged by the objects. The paper concludes with a close examination of contemporary descriptive and evaluative nomenclature for ngatu made with synthetic materials, including examples at Te Papa.

KEYWORDS: Te Papa, Pacific Cultures collection, ngatu, barkcloths, Tonga, New Zealand, nomenclature.

Introduction

The Pacific Cultures collection at the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa (Te Papa) includes Tongan barkcloths (ngatu) representative of material and technological innovation, significant historical events, and the confluence of seemingly divergent Tongan and museological politics of prestige. This paper examines their trajectories into the collection, the stories they tell and the narratives they illustrate there, and analyses Tongan systems for naming and categorising contemporary barkcloths, including those used at Te Papa.

The term polyvocal has been chosen here for its literal meaning, 'many voices', and its resonance with urban Pacific coinages such as 'polynisation'. Polynisation is a term associated with the late Jim Vivieaere, a New Zealand-based artist and independent curator of Rarotongan descent, who used it to describe the reappropriation of Polynesian ideas and

values by Polynesians, the ways in which Polynesian and Western popular culture have melded, and also the possibilities presented by these transactions (Refiti 1996: 124).¹ As well as being a literal descriptor of the multiple and overlapping Tongan systems of nomenclature for contemporary ngatu (see Table 1), the term polyvocal encompasses the many voices employed to talk about barkcloths that incorporate Tongan and Western materials and values, and the possibilities for Tongan vocality presented by their transaction into a display by New Zealand's national museum. Indeed, polyvocality is a key tenet of Te Papa's aim to 'provide the means [for New Zealanders] to contribute effectively to the Museum as a statement of New Zealand identity', as formalised in the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa Act 1992. In addition, the Act requires the board of Te Papa to 'have regard to the ethnic and cultural diversity of the people of New Zealand, and the contributions they have made and continue to make to

New Zealand's cultural life and the fabric of New Zealand society' and to 'endeavour to ensure that the Museum is a source of pride for all New Zealanders' (New Zealand Government 2005: 6).

Although the term *ngatu* is utilised throughout this paper as the generic Tongan term for decorated barkcloth, there are numerous Tongan terms for barkcloth discussed herein and in use at Te Papa. The museum is known for its use of indigenous and vernacular names for its Pacific Cultures objects, notably on its exhibition labels, in publications and throughout its online database system. Te Papa also involves indigenous communities and curators in the development of its exhibitions; the curatorial team responsible for the exhibitions discussed here included Tongans Maile Drake (former Pacific Cultures collections manager) and Kolokesa Māhina-Tuai (former Pacific Cultures curator). Pacific communities are regularly consulted as exhibitions are crafted from concept to reality and collections are augmented and updated, and this high level of participation demonstrates that the museum is viewed as a place where Pacific communities' tangible and intangible cultures can be protected and celebrated as part of New Zealand's story (Ross 2007: 2).

A Tongan story is told at Te Papa as part of a New Zealand-based contemporary and collective Pacific culture: an 'everyday' experience at 'our place'. Te Papa unabashedly exhibits the contemporary alongside the historical, sometimes to strong criticism, in its attempt to image identities for all of New Zealand's people. The ability of *ngatu* to tell a Tongan story in New Zealand hinges on the way that 'indigenous art can simultaneously proclaim difference or distinctiveness *from* the surrounding nation-state and also express that nation's identity within the world of nations. Objects, with their multivalent potentials, seem uniquely able to carry out such symbolic projects' (Myers 2004: 205). Where a New Zealand story is concerned – or exhibited – Pacific peoples are conceptualised as having expansive histories only very recently linked to the country. Where Tongans in New Zealand are exhibited, the story embraces their expansive history but is mediated by, and told through, New Zealand-based events. These narratives are often illustrated by contemporary objects made in, or linked to, New Zealand, such as *ngatu*.

The *ngatu* considered in this paper can be characterised, first and foremost, by their age. With the exception of one dating from 1953 (Te Papa FE005172), they were all made post-1990. Since the Pacific Cultures collection was first

Table 1 *Ngatu* nomenclature systems.

All hiapo (paper mulberry)	Top layer hiapo, substrate synthetic	All synthetic
<i>ngatu</i>	<i>ngatu pepa</i>	<i>ngatu pepa</i>
<i>ngatu ngatu</i>	<i>ngatu pepa laulalo</i>	<i>ngatu pepa katoa</i>
<i>ngatu mo'oni</i>	<i>ngatu loi</i>	<i>ngatu loi</i>
<i>ngatu fakatonga</i>	<i>ngatu hafekasi</i>	<i>ngatu fakapālangi</i>

delineated as a separate collection in 1993, its acquisition priorities have had a strong focus on the contemporary, including:

- Items for exhibitions, particularly those created and /or used in New Zealand by New Zealanders of Pacific Island descent, including items which show innovative use of materials or designs.
- Items that help to underpin research into the expressions of identity by Pacific people in New Zealand.
- Selected heritage items from Pacific cultures for exhibitions and education programmes or which provide context for contemporary items. (Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa 2004b: 3)

Indeed, it is matter of pride for the museum that Te Papa's 'significant contemporary [Pacific] collections make it unique in the world. [We] are not aware of any other institution collecting contemporary [Pacific] material as actively as Te Papa' (Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa 2004a: 3).

The *ngatu* I discuss can also be distinguished by their materiality. *Ngatu* are customarily made from the inner bark of the hiapo (paper mulberry, *Broussonetia papyrifera*), beaten into supple sheets called *feta'aki*. Starchy root vegetables, such as the maho'a Tonga (Polynesian arrow-root, *Tacca leontopetaloides*), manioke koka'anga (cassava or tapioca, *Manihot esculenta*) and misimisi (common flowering canna lily, *Canna indica*), are rubbed on the *feta'aki* sheets to paste them together. Concurrently, *kupesi* (motifs) are stained into the cloth with tree-bark dyes known as *koka* (red cedar, *Bischofia javanica*), *tongo* (native mangrove, *Rhizophora mangle*) and *tuitui* (candlenut tree, *Aleurites moluccana*). When the barkcloth is assembled and has dried, *kupesi* details are overpainted with *tongo* or *tuitui* bark dyes. The special type of barkcloth known as *ngatu'uli* (black barkcloth) is coloured with *tuitui* soot prepared from burned *tuitui* kernels, and *umea*, a clay obtained from

the northern archipelago of Vava'u, or more often from Anokula on the southern island of 'Eua.

However, the making of ngatu is not a static artform, impervious to change. In her important M.A. thesis completed in 1963, 'Cultural change in Tongan bark-cloth manufacture', Maxine Tamahori outlined in great detail the numerous changes that had already taken place in a complex she described as both incorporating and resisting innovation (Tamahori 1963: 213). In the mid-1980s, Tongan women in New Zealand began to explore the potential of synthetic materials and new technologies for making ngatu. Though synthetic fabrics, dyes and pastes were far removed from the plants, clay and tools that had been used to make ngatu for many centuries, these women were willing to experiment with them in order to produce ngatu in their new urban contexts. Store-bought fabrics, dyes and glues were experimented with, as were pigments produced from brick dust and soot, tyre and ironmonger's paint, and a simple paste made from flour and water.² In adherence with time-honoured practices, these new materials were made into ngatu using the techniques of the koka'anga, the communal barkcloth-making work sessions described below. Indeed, in 1999, it was suggested that, despite some minor differences in technique, 'late 18th and early 19th century technological descriptions of ngatu manufacture could apply to contemporary procedures' (Herda 1999: 152). The first synthetic ngatu incorporated a base layer of a spunbond material (trademarked varieties of which are commonly used as interfacing in the manufacture of clothing and reusable grocery bags, such as Pellon and Vilene) with a top layer of beaten bark; subsequent varieties were made entirely from synthetic materials. Both types were first known, colloquially, as ngatu pepa (ngatu made with 'paper'), and both are now made alongside plant-based ngatu in the Tongan diaspora and in Tonga itself.

Plant- and synthetic-based ngatu, though materially different, both conform to what art historian Jehanne Teilhet-Fisk (1991) termed Tongan 'sociocultural art-making ideologies'. These are performative art-making practices commensurate with Tongan social and cultural tenets, which Teilhet-Fisk (1991: 41) further defined as 'symbolic meanings, gender structures, and production decisions, as well as economic, social, and cultural factors'. Whether using beaten bark or synthetic material, ngatu-makers prepare a double-layered cloth and decorate it with Tongan motifs; each finished ngatu is the material output of individual and communal effort; each ngatu is (usually) intended as

a gift; and each ngatu embodies the potential to represent and 'regenerate Tongan people culturally' (Kaeppler 1999: 170). Despite the initial and ongoing ambivalent responses to ngatu made with synthetic materials, one of the first made in Auckland was gifted to Queen Halaevalu Mata'aho Ahome'e in the mid-1990s³ and in 2006 two synthetic ngatu were presented at the funeral of King Tāufa'āhau Tupou IV (Veys 2009: 143). Prior to this, a synthetic ngatu was used under the King's casket, when his body was returned to Tonga from Auckland; this ngatu is now in the Pacific Cultures collection at Te Papa.

Mana Pasifika: celebrating Pacific cultures

When Te Papa opened its doors on 14 February 1998, the first of its Pacific exhibitions, *Mana Pasifika: celebrating Pacific cultures*, was 'upbeat in tone and celebrated the persistence and survival of Pacific cultures in New Zealand' (Ross 2007: 2). *Mana Pasifika* occupied a small corner of the main exhibition hall, which necessitated a modest showcase of the extensive Pacific collections. Its historical and contemporary displays were grouped together around social and cultural themes designed to bring 'the feel of the tropical Pacific – its warmth and vibrancy – to Te Papa' (Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa 2012) in a context that demonstrated Pacific peoples' contributions to the development of New Zealand within a paradigm of continued cultural practice:

Treasures such as jewellery, weapons, musical instruments, and fine carvings illustrate the rich Pacific past. Also displayed are contemporary items, ranging from a Jonah Lomu phonocard set to Michel Tuffery's corned-beef-can cattle sculpture.

You can see how, over the years, Pacific peoples have adopted new materials and blended Pacific and European styles. But objects such as fine mats, tapa, tivaevae (Cook Island quilts), and Fijian tabua (whale-tooth ornaments) remain at the heart of their cultures and are as important on ceremonial occasions today as they were a hundred years ago. (Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa 2012)

This juxtaposition of contemporary pieces with the historical collections was not without its detractors; a review of the exhibition condemned the display of historic artefacts with their contemporary substitutes, focusing on a Tongan example:



Fig. 1 Ngatu launima, c. 1953, barkcloth, 22730 × 4340 mm. Artists unknown (Te Papa FE005172). *In situ* at *Mana Pasifika*, Te Papa, 2003 (photo: Te Papa). This ngatu was made to celebrate the visit of Queen Elizabeth II to Tonga, and was later placed under the casket of the late Queen Sālote Mafile'ō Pilolevu Veiongo Tupou III when her body was returned to Tonga from Auckland in 1965.

Most offensive of all, a deeply patinated 19th-century kava bowl from Tonga is forced to share its glass case with a plastic ice cream container. All over the world, marvellous indigenous carving and pottery traditions have died, thanks to the importation of cheap aluminium and plastic containers. This is hardly something to celebrate, and that aged bowl deserves the dignity of an attention undistracted by its tacky, modern surrogate. (Dutton 1998: 23)

However, by exhibiting the ice-cream container and kava bowl together, Te Papa's curators were not suggesting that kava circles were held around ice-cream containers, nor that ice-cream containers had replaced kava bowls for this purpose; rather, they were demonstrating a continuum of practice, whereby an ice-cream container can be used in the production of *koloa* ('things that one treasures'), including ngatu. Tongan barkcloth-makers often use plastic ice-cream containers as receptacles for their dyes and pastes where formerly they used carved wooden dishes such as *kumete* and kava bowls.

When the *Mana Pasifika* exhibition was refreshed in 2003, it included a huge ngatu that was displayed in a tightly contained way. A Cook Islands drum set at the centre of the

original exhibition was replaced with a newly acquired Tongan drum set propped on a bale of ngatu, to show how drums might be presented in Tonga (Fig. 1). The display of the Tongan items was guided by Maile Drake, who folded the ngatu in a traditional Tongan way, with its outer edge exposed to show the numbered border that 'counts' the sections of a ngatu. This method of folding exhibits the scale of the ngatu through the knowledge of its size indicated by its borders.

The ngatu displayed was a launima made in 1953 (Te Papa FE005172) to celebrate the visit of Queen Elizabeth II to Tonga, and used in 1965 under the coffin of the late Queen Sālote Mafile'ō Pilolevu Veiongo Tupou III (Queen Sālote) when her body was returned to Tonga after she died in Auckland. A launima is a ngatu comprising 50 numbered sections known as *langanga*, and is approximately 24 m long. Some ngatu called *lautefuhu* are 100 *langanga* long, and, owing to the methods by which they are constructed, ngatu can be made larger still. Lengths of ngatu have long been used to line pathways for members of the Tongan Royal Family to walk along and even drive their cars on. This



Fig. 2 Ngatu launima, c. 2006, barkcloth and synthetic fabric, 25600 × 4000 mm. Artists unknown (Te Papa FE012060). Presentation ceremony at Te Papa Marae, 27 February 2008 (photo: Te Papa). This ngatu was placed under the casket of King Tāufa'āhau Tupou IV when his body was returned to Tonga from Auckland in 2006.

is a way of honouring the Royal Family and also of containing their personal *mana* (personal potency or power), making the road safe for commoners to walk on afterwards (Veys 2009: 141). Hixon (2000: 199) described Queen Sālote's strict adherence to this protocol when in Tonga: 'at ceremonials she stepped on lengths of *tapa*, her feet not touching the earth', and the streets were lined with ngatu for her funeral.

For the visit of Queen Elizabeth II to Tonga in 1953, ngatu was prepared in great quantities to cover the paths along which she and Queen Sālote walked. According to Kenneth Bain (1954: 34), former Secretary to the Government of Tonga, 'Each village of Tongatapu made fifty yards of *tapa* [ngatu] and twenty *kiekie* [waist garments]; in all there was over a mile of *tapa*'. Afterwards, the ngatu was divided into small pieces and given to the British sailors at Queen Sālote's instruction, as a sign of respect for Queen Elizabeth II, whose exalted status was acknowledged and

appreciated by Queen Sālote (Bain 1954: 62). Because the monarchs had walked on these ngatu and exposed them to their *mana*, the ngatu could not be allowed to circulate in the Tongan gift economy, but by their division and distribution this *mana* could be safely contained and distributed, and the exalted status of the queens preserved. Unlike most of the ngatu made and used for this visit, the launima now at Te Papa was kept intact and in the royal stores, before it was used again in close proximity to Queen Sālote herself, and thereafter gifted to the Royal New Zealand Air Force (RNZAF) by the Tongan Royal Family. In 1968, the receiving officer, Flight Lieutenant McAllister (the pilot of the plane that carried the Queen's body back to Tonga), presented the ngatu to the Dominion Museum (Te Papa's predecessor).

Mirroring the events following Queen Sālote's death, in 2006 a ngatu (Te Papa FE012060) and two fine mats that had been placed under the casket of the late King Tāufa'āhau Tupou IV (King Tāufa'āhau) during the return of his body

to Tonga from Auckland on an RNZAF C-130 Hercules were donated to the 40 Squadron RNZAF by his wife, Queen Halaevalu Mata'aho. At the time of gifting, the Tongan Royal Family suggested that the ngatu (a launima made with a base layer of synthetic fabric) be cut into smaller pieces and distributed among the squadron (S. Mallon, pers. comm., October 2010). This is commensurate with the division of the pieces walked upon by Queen Sālote and Queen Elizabeth II, and befits the rank of King Tāufa'āhau, whose own mana was released upon his death (Veys 2009: 140). Operating within a Western paradigm but with the same interest in preserving the status of the late King, 40 Squadron's leader wished to keep the ngatu intact rather than cut it up – an act that may have seemed to denigrate its prestige and that of the late King. The squadron's leader sought instead to place the ngatu into a museum, a Western place of honour; it was donated to Te Papa during a formal ceremony in 2008 (Fig. 2). Tongan support of this initiative and attendance at the presentation ceremony further honoured the role the RNZAF had played in returning the deceased monarch to Tonga, and demonstrated a skilful navigation of transnational politics of prestige.

It can only be surmised that in 1965, as in 2008, a suggestion may have been made that the ngatu used under Queen Sālote's casket be cut into pieces and distributed among the RNZAF crew. That both of these ngatu survive intact is evidence of a Tongan engagement with Western politics of prestige and honour. On each occasion, the RNZAF chose to honour and keep the ngatu as a historical document of sorts at the Museum of New Zealand, and their decision to do so was upheld and supported by Tongan officials. Indeed, the value of ngatu to mediate not only status and kinship relationships but also complex intercultural ones has long been utilised in situations where they are gifted to non-Tongans. These include the multifaceted historical exchange relations between Tonga, Fiji and Samoa, and the first encounters with European visitors to Tongan shores (ngatu are first mentioned by the Dutchmen Willem Schouten and Jacob Le Maire in 1616, but the oldest ngatu extant are from Captain Cook's voyage of 1773–74). In time-honoured fashion, the gifting of the two twentieth-century royal launima some 40 years apart instantiated the relationship between the Tongan Royal Family and the RNZAF, and their presence at Te Papa, the Museum of New Zealand, can be read as an instantiation of the relationship between the nations of Tonga and New Zealand.

In *Mana Pasifika*, the tightly constrained display of the launima associated with Queen Sālote and Queen Elizabeth II is a further example of Tongan agency at Te Papa. When Maile Drake chose to exhibit the launima folded, she asserted a Tongan mode of presentation commensurate with layered gifts but at odds with Western gallery norms. Tongans often present significant gifts folded into bundles with the comment, 'Koe me'a si'i si'i pe' ('It's just something small'). This meaning is encompassed by the proverb 'Tu'a ē sino kae 'eiki ē fekau' ('A commoner who bears a chief's message'), alluding to something good that appears less impressive on the outside (Māhina 2004: 87). For Tongans, rather than diminishing its appearance and the opportunity to appreciate it, a beautifully folded ngatu can evoke māfana, or 'warmth of heart', an emotional response to Tongan aesthetic achievement. In this instance, māfana is evoked not solely in response to how a ngatu looks but also how well it performs when it is presented; the visual impact and three-dimensionality of ngatu is enhanced when it is used to line streets, carried as rippling sheets held high by lines of women, or presented, as here, in a carefully folded bundle.

It is ironic, then, that the exhibition of a bundle of ngatu may have been perceived as diminishing the value of the object because it diverged from the now classic mode of display where barkcloth are draped over poles and suspended from walls and ceilings. As Herda (2002: 143) has noted with regard to Cook Islands tivaevae (quilts), when tivaevae were exhibited folded in art galleries in New Zealand the makers were angered by the perception that 'the tivaevae that were hung were deemed "better" than those that were folded or piled'. In contrast, when displayed folded at Te Papa, the launima evoked a specifically Tongan type of aesthetic appreciation, speaking volumes to a Tongan audience.

Paperskin: the art of tapa cloth

The launima made for Queen Sālote and Queen Elizabeth II had a more recent outing at the *Paperskin: the art of tapa cloth* exhibition in 2010.⁴ A new installation method utilising small but powerful magnets anchored the 22.7 m-long and 4.3 m-wide ngatu to a large curved wall, where it effectively embraced all of the other barkcloths on display, dominating the space and imaging both Tongan society and the Tongan relationship with the British Royal Family (Fig. 3). This was the first time such a large ngatu had been displayed in its entirety in a gallery in New Zealand. The display of the launima in this way referred back to the way



Fig. 3 Ngatu launima, c. 1953, barkcloth, 22730 × 4340 mm. Artists unknown (Te Papa FE005172). Installation in progress for *Paperskin: the art of tapa cloth*, Te Papa, 2010 (photo: Te Papa). This is the same ngatu as shown in Fig. 1.

it had been used in Tonga, stretched out to make a pathway for the two monarchs to walk along.

When Tongans line pathways with ngatu, the ngatu not only contain the mana of those who walk upon them and evoke a māfana response, they also embody collectivity. Anthropologist Nicholas Thomas explains how collectivity can be manifest through the malleability of barkcloth:

Tapa was presented not only in bundles that were wrapped around individuals, but also sometimes in long strips that were carried by dozens of individuals in line; and in some cases, long and wide strips were laid along the ground, especially for those of high rank to walk along.

These uses of the material are significant because, in many parts of the Pacific, the metaphor of the path is fundamental to the imagining of relations of alliance and affinity. The long strip of cloth gives material form to the path, but does more than make a relationship visible: its presentation by a long line of people also makes their collective action, and their very collectivity, manifest. Neither society in general nor a particular group such as a clan simply exist; a sense of collectivity cannot be present in people's minds unless a group somehow appears and acts

as a whole ... It is in this context that collective products, such as large pieces of barkcloth, are especially important. The art form is part of a process of self-revelation and has a particular importance at a moment of presentation, when everyone's efforts converge; at other times, the cloth's significance may lie in the prospect or memory of such ceremonial events, or in a particular history of exchange-paths. (Thomas 1995: 143)

The pathways formed by ngatu are most significant when they are constructed for members of the Tongan Royal Family, and Tongan collectivity is manifest in the ngatu laid out to protect and respect their monarchs. A similar pathway was evoked by the launima exhibited in *Paperskin*. While the significance of the launima lies primarily in its evocation of the memory of a significant ceremonial event and its instantiation of the relationship between the two queens, its display in *Paperskin* also facilitated an 'imagining of relations of alliance and affinity' (Thomas 1995: 143), the history of its own particular exchange-paths and an imaging of Tongan identity.

Tangata o le Moana: the story of Pacific people in New Zealand

In October 2007, Te Papa celebrated the opening of its newly refurbished Pacific galleries with performances, artists' talks, a Pacific market and a new long-term exhibition called *Tangata o le Moana: the story of Pacific people in New Zealand*. This exhibition tells the stories of Pacific cultures in New Zealand through a chronological framework that assesses the highs and lows of Pacific lives lived here. It engages with challenges to Pacific identities, such as the 'dawn raids' that targeted Pacific overstayers in New Zealand during the 1970s, and highlights New Zealand-based and New Zealand-assessed Pacific achievements, such as Tana Umaga's appointment as the first Pacific captain of the All Blacks (Teaiwa & Mallon 2005: 209). *Tangata o le Moana* continues Te Papa's approach of juxtaposing the contemporary with the historical, in recognition of a Pacific conceptualisation of time. This is in accordance with Tongan notions of the time continuum, in which the present is conceived as a dynamic space in relation to both past and future.

Installed high on one wall of *Tangata o le Moana* is a ngatu pepa made in 2000 by Kulupu Taliangi (Tongan Langafonua Tamaki Community Centre), Auckland, New Zealand (Te Papa FE011603; Fig. 4). Made from two layers of Vilene decorated with red-brick dust and black ironmonger's paint, the ngatu has wide white borders on all sides containing repeated motifs rather than the numbered sections common to a ngatu. These borders and motifs are markers of a special type of Tongan barkcloth called a fuatanga. Historically, these were high-ranking barkcloths pieced together and decorated differently to other ngatu.

Tongan barkcloths are pieced together and simultaneously coloured and decorated by groups of women at a koka'anga. This process takes its name from koka, the brownish-red dye most commonly used to make ngatu, and loosely translates as 'the adding of koka' (Tamahori 1963: 90). The work session convened to make a ngatu is called a koka'anga hangatonu (straightforward adding of koka), and that convened to make a fuatanga is a koka'anga fuatanga (adding of koka to a fuatanga). For both, kupesi rubbing tablets are attached to the surface of a long, usually convex worktable called a papa koka'anga, then feta'aki strips are laid over them, to make the base layer, or laulalo. Women sit on each side of the papa koka'anga, facing their work partners, with a woman at each end neatening the edge of the barkcloth as it is made. The surface of the feta'aki is pounded with parboiled root vegetables, and a wad of

feta'aki (tae) dipped in dye is rubbed across the cloth to reveal the raised kupesi patterns. The strips of feta'aki that will make the top layer, or lau'olunga, are then placed over the laulalo and at right angles to it, giving strength to the completed cloth, and the whole is rubbed with dye again. This section of barkcloth, equivalent to two langanga, is then lifted to one side of the papa koka'anga to rest in the laps of the women seated there while the next section is made and adhered to it.

When a koka'anga hangatonu is convened, this process is continued until the ngatu reaches the desired length; a standard length made in a contemporary koka'anga hangatonu is a launima comprising 50 langanga. The kupesi design tablets are arranged to leave a clear border at either end of the papa koka'anga, and it is this border that becomes the numbered sides of a completed ngatu. The strips of feta'aki that are pasted together to become the bottom layer of a ngatu are placed lengthwise along the papa koka'anga, while the strips placed on top are at right angles to these. No ngatu is wider than the papa koka'anga on which it was made, but there is no limit to its potential length.

In the koka'anga fuatanga a barkcloth is constructed using the same techniques and materials as in a koka'anga hangatonu, but the constituent layers and sections are at right angles to the orientation of those used to make a ngatu. The lower layer of feta'aki strips are placed *across* the papa koka'anga and the top layer is placed *along* its length, and langanga are made in this way until the desired *width* of the fuatanga has been achieved.⁵ Whereas each pass over the papa koka'anga during a koka'anga hangatonu produces a ngatu section that is two langanga long and up to (but never more than) the width of the papa koka'anga, during a koka'anga fuatanga each pass over the papa koka'anga adds two ngatu langanga to the *width* of the fuatanga. One standard fuatanga langanga (measured, like a ngatu langanga, along the length of the completed barkcloth) is eight ngatu langanga wide and the length of the papa koka'anga on which it was made. This measurement is called fuatanga toku valu; in the past, fuatanga langanga have been made with sections up to 15 ngatu langanga wide, a measurement known as toka taha nima (Tamahori 1963: 193; Fanua 1986:16).

After each fuatanga langanga is completed, it is shifted off one *end* of the papa koka'anga. The process then begins again, with eight more langanga pasted together and simultaneously joined to the side of the fuatanga langanga already made. Fuatanga can thus be wider than the papa koka'anga on which they are made; indeed, there is no limit to their width or length. Four 125-section fuatanga, called lauteau,



Fig. 4 Ngatu pepa, 2000, Vilene, 6600 × 4600 mm. Artists from Kulupu Talianga (Tongan Langafonua Tamaki Community Centre) (Te Papa FE011603) (photo: Te Papa).

were made, respectively, by the women of Fu'amotu, Tatakamotonga, Lapaha and Holonga for the 1947 joint royal weddings of Fatafehi (later known by the title Prince Tu'ipelehake) and Melenaite Tupoumoheofo Veikune, and the Crown Prince (who came to the throne in 1965 as King Tāufa'āhau Tupou IV, but in 1947 was still called Tupouto'a Tungī) and Halaevalu Mata'aho 'Ahome'e; the combined length of these fuatanga lauteau was over a mile (Tamahori 1963: 195).

Alongside the historical differences in their production, ngatu and fuatanga are visually discrete categories. Ngatu designs run in rows across the width of the barkcloth, separated by the measuring lines that mark langanga. These langanga markers in turn intersect with lines running the length of the ngatu, separating the decorated body of the barkcloth, which contains the named motif, from the white border. In contrast, fuatanga designs run in rows down the length of the barkcloth, and series of lines across its width mark its langanga sections and measure its size. Where ngatu have distinctive numbered borders, fuatanga have wide white borders containing kupesi associated specifically with the fuatanga form.

Contemporary fuatanga are often made at a koka'anga hangatonu in the same way as ngatu, and therefore are only as wide as the papa koka'anga on which they are made, but the visual distinctions are maintained. The term fuatanga is now used to designate a ngatu that is square, with designs running in longitudinal rows and large borders containing fuatanga kupesi, demonstrating an expansion of the fuatanga category and term to accommodate contemporary forms. In this way, Tongan nomenclature is preserved through the classification of contemporary barkcloths by their appearance and functionality, using terms that were previously applied to discrete historical forms. This also keeps the knowledge of some barkcloth types alive, even if the historical forms themselves are no longer being made, or are manufactured using different techniques and materials. These fuatanga continue to rank more highly than ngatu and are appropriate gifts at weddings and funerals.

The ngatu pepa on display in *Tāngata o le Moana* has a central panel containing elongated diamonds called kalou, which represent seed pods; groups of dots called tukihea; and stylised plant motifs (Kooijman 1972: 326). Its border motifs are specific to the fuatanga form and include pairs of tall triangular motifs extending from the coloured centre of the piece, their top points each capped with a pair of spiral curls called mui moa ('chickens' tails'); and pairs of squat isosceles triangles joined together at their widest angle, called

vaka tou ('double-hull canoe'). These motifs allude to the linking of two families or lineages: the vaka tou represents the families, with the more highly ranked of the two featuring as the larger hull; and the mui moa are a heliaki, or metaphor, for female generativity.⁶

Quite aside from the story alluded to by its motifs, which are not the focus of this paper, this ngatu pepa speaks of Pacific continuity in new environments through art. As part of the broader narrative of the exhibition, the ngatu pepa focuses attention on the New Zealand experiences of Tongans: it is a picture of Tongan life in New Zealand. The wall label identifies the barkcloth as a 'Ngatu Pepa (Tongan "barkcloth" made with Vilene)', and explains:

Ngatu (Tongan barkcloth) is often given or exchanged on special occasions such as weddings, funerals, and 21st birthdays. Tongans in New Zealand continue to make ngatu but experiment with locally available materials. The lengthy process of pounding barkcloth is no longer necessary because of synthetic material. Here the Kulupu Talianga women's group have substituted the bark and natural dyes of ngatu with synthetic fabric and paints.

The label further explains the basic context in which ngatu are made, and refers to their plant-based construction through a description of how this synthetic version differs. It firmly locates the object in New Zealand.

Maile Drake sourced this ngatu pepa directly from its makers, who were proud to have their work chosen for acquisition and exhibition by New Zealand's national museum because they were cognisant of the status the purchase would impart to them there (M. Drake, pers. comm., May 2007). Its makers, Kulupu Talianga, engaged with the museum as an institution of considerable status in New Zealand, and chose to be represented by their ngatu pepa in this paradigm. Te Papa works towards its goal of being 'our place' in part through acquisitions such as this, which allow contemporary New Zealand-based Tongans to see their innovations and therefore themselves exhibited as part of New Zealand's national identity.

Examples from Te Papa's collection rooms: two distinctly contemporary ngatu

In April 2002, I visited the Pacific Culture collections at Te Papa and viewed two large ngatu, one of which is due to be installed in *Tāngata o le Moana* when the exhibition is refreshed (the textiles were planned to be refreshed every six

months, but the ngatu pepa has been *in situ* for much longer (S. Mallon, pers. comm., April 2008)). Kolokesa Māhina-Tuai (then acting curator Pacific Cultures) showed me to a storeroom where two ngatu had been prepared for viewing. They had been unrolled from their storage rolls onto a wool-edged pandanus mat on the concrete floor, as they were too large to be displayed on a table.

The first contemporary ngatu I was shown seemed a very obvious example of a ‘reconditioned’ ngatu (Te Papa FE11605; Fig. 5). This ngatu is a plant-based ngatu‘uli (black ngatu) made in the fuatanga form, with white borders on all sides containing fuatanga motifs, including mui moa and vaka tou. Ngatu‘uli are Tongan barkcloths with distinctive panels of heavy black pigmentation. Where the more commonly made ngatu tahina, or ‘white barkcloth’ (usually shortened simply to ngatu), have central panels of decorative motifs in brown overlaid with darker embellishments, ngatu‘uli are usually rather austere. They are a chiefly form of barkcloth, historically made only for nobility and members of the Tongan Royal Family, and used primarily as wedding and funeral presentations. Ngatu‘uli are decorated with umea clay pigment overlaid with tuitui soot, the most labour-intensive and time-consuming pigment to produce in the Tongan ngatu-maker’s repertoire. Tuitui kernels are burned on a fire under a suspended pot, upon which the fine soot collects and hangs in strands. The formalities associated with the production of this soot are complex, and ngatu-makers believe that they must follow them in order for the process to be successful.⁷ Tuitui soot is either dissolved in koka dye to make a black dye, or sprinkled onto barkcloth and rubbed in with a koka dye-soaked pad or a light application of coconut oil.

The difference between the Te Papa ngatu‘uli and many others I have seen concerns the way that the coloured centre of the fuatanga has been decorated: it is mottled from mid-brown to near-black, with a pre-existing pattern still visible through the dark pigment. According to the acquisition notes in the Pacific Cultures catalogue made by Janet Davidson, former senior curator of Pacific Cultures, and reproduced in Te Papa’s *Collections online* database, the piece was made as a fuatanga ngatu tahina (white fuatanga) and later converted to a ngatu‘uli (Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa n.d.). This is therefore an example of the recycling or ‘upcycling’ of plant-based ngatu to meet changing obligations. Though ideally ngatu‘uli will be constructed from fresh fetaki and stored for use at occasions such as weddings and funerals, there are some instances when they must be prepared more quickly than time will allow.

One such occasion was the sudden death of the Honourable Heu‘ifanga ‘Ahome‘e in December 1996. To meet the requirements of her funeral, a very large ngatu‘uli was pieced together from sections of ngatu tahina joined at their ends and painted over with a uniform central panel of tuitui.⁸ The borders of this ngatu‘uli are irregular, and the kupesi used to decorate the individual ngatu tahina can be seen through the black pigment, betraying the means by which it was hurriedly made (Figs 6 and 7).⁹ The black pigment is shiny, and has little pieces of grit stuck to its surface, suggesting it was made by mixing tuitui and, probably, ground-up burned tuitui kernels with koka dye.

The ngatu‘uli of Heu‘ifanga ‘Ahome‘e is particularly interesting and important because it records a pragmatic solution to the problem of how to honour a deceased member of the Tongan hou‘eiki (nobility) appropriately. The ngatu‘uli is likely to have been used to demarcate a pathway along which her coffin travelled to her final resting place, to contain her mana and make the road safe to walk on after her funeral. In addition, the importance of warming this pathway with ngatu‘uli relates to the metaphorical association of Tongan people with the Earth (both known as fonua), and the need to facilitate the transition of the deceased into the realm of the ancestors: ‘As the saying goes, ‘Oku ‘eiki ‘ae taba hé ene mate: “at death, one becomes a chief”’ (Young-Leslie 1999: 79).

Te Papa’s upcycled ngatu‘uli also has an interesting background. It is recorded as having been given by a woman to her brother as a special gift. Anthropologist Heather Young-Leslie (1999: 259) observed that such gifts were sometimes exchanged between siblings to celebrate the New Year, when men gave their sisters a gift of food (ngaue) and women gave their brothers a mat or piece of ngatu. Davidson recorded that this type of gift was called a kafu (which translates as ‘blanket’), and is of special significance in Tongan society. This fuatanga was made in Tongatapu in 1990 and presented during a visit to New Zealand. In 1996, when the woman made a return visit to New Zealand, she took the fuatanga home with her and had it made into a ngatu‘uli by the Kautaha Hoosi Tea [*sic*] in Fua‘amotu. In 1997, the barkcloth, now a ngatu‘uli, was returned to New Zealand as a more valuable gift to her brother’s family. It was acquired by Te Papa in 2001. Though not visually impressive, owing to its untidy borders and the inconsistency of its black pigmentation, this is an interesting piece, demonstrative of Te Papa’s bold acquisition strategies. Like the upcycled ngatu made for the sudden death of Heu‘ifanga ‘Ahome‘e, it demonstrates the potential for ngatu to be remade in order



Fig. 5 Ngatu'uli (black tapa cloth), made 1990 (original artist(s) unknown), redecorated 1997 by Kautaha Hoosi Tea [*sic*] in Fua'amotu, barkcloth, 6400 × 5040 mm (Te Papa FE011605) (photo: Te Papa).



Fig. 6 Detail of Ngatu'uli of the Hon. Heu'ifanga 'Ahome'e, c. 1996, barkcloth, 19800 × 4200 mm. Artist unknown. *In situ* at FHE Galleries, Auckland, 2010 (photo: Billie Lythberg).

to shift their value and use. Significantly, there is no Tongan term for this; rather, the use of Tongan terminology shifts in response to changes in appearance and potential for use. What was formerly a fuatanga is now a ngatu'uli at Te Papa, and what were formerly several ngatu tahina sections are now a ngatu'uli at the Fogarty, Hojsgaard and Entwisle (FHE) Galleries in Auckland.

The second ngatu I was shown in Te Papa is one of the museum's signature pieces of synthetic ngatu. Made in Upper Hutt and called a ngatu tupenu Vilene (which translates loosely as 'decorated Vilene barkcloth') by its makers (Fig. 8), it features prominently in some of Te Papa's publications, an indication of its significance within the Pacific Cultures collection.¹⁰ Acquired in 1997, it was the first of several synthetic ngatu that have been purchased by the museum. Maile Drake assisted with its purchase and recalled the interest that Te Papa's curators had in the new materials and technologies being explored by makers of ngatu in Upper Hutt, and the enthusiasm with which their purchase was met by the ngatu's makers (M. Drake, pers. comm., May 2007).



Fig. 7 Ngatu'uli of the Hon. Heu'ifanga 'Ahome'e, c. 1996, barkcloth, 19800 × 4200 mm. Artist unknown. *In situ* at FHE Galleries, Auckland, 2010 (photo: Billie Lythberg).

The ngatu tupenu Vilene is half the size of a normal launima, and was made in 1996 by members of the (now defunct) Ilo Me'a Fo'ou (New Creations) Tongan Women's Group, Upper Hutt, New Zealand. It is recorded as being made from Vilene, red-brick paint and black ironmonger's paint. It shows evidence of having been made with kupesi, but it has a peculiarly flat and uniform look to it; elaborately decorated, it nonetheless looks like a woven and printed textile rather than a hand-made and hand-decorated barkcloth. The flat appearance of its surface seems to have been produced by the peculiarities of its materials, and the slight incompatibility of Vilene and the pigments used on its surface.

The ngatu tupenu Vilene contains 25 numbered langanga decorated with various motifs: the stylised bat-like motif is a reference to Tonga's sacred flying fox colonies at Kolovai and Ha'avakatolo in Tongatapu; the three large dots with simplified leaves are known as tukiheia; the strips of the vane-swastika motif are known in Tonga as manulua ('two birds'); and the elongated diamond called kalou



Fig. 8 Ngatu tupenu Vilene, 1996, Vilene, 12210 × 4600 mm. Artists from Ilo Me'a Fo'ou (New Creations) Tongan Women's Group, Upper Hutt (Te Papa FE010743) (photo: Te Papa).

represents seed pods (Kooijman 1972: 326). Unusually for a ngatu, written across its top border is the word 'ANGA', meaning 'way of being', complemented by a personal name written in capitals on its bottom border, 'IOANE', which identifies it with a particular family.

This piece is especially interesting – and was possibly unique at the time – because of the aims of the women who made it. In 1996, a group of 12 Tongan women got together and began talking about what they could use to re-create a koka'anga in Upper Hutt. They trialled different synthetic fabrics and pigments, and drew on the experience of a young relative at Whitireia Polytechnic, who eventually supplied them with three custom-mixed commercial dyes.¹¹ The women then made a fuatanga for each member of their group during the first year of their koka'anga, and a launima each in the second year, using synthetic materials and flour and water paste, but incorporating plant-based design tablets known as kupesi tui. In this case, the recipient, who was also involved in making it wished to have two half-sized launima instead of one large one – one to keep and one to sell, ideally to Te Papa:

We want to be recognised, so we made it and took it to Te Papa. We made it because we wanted them to buy it. We believe in the history of what we did back then. We didn't use the other ngatu we made for exchanges, we kept them to give to our children. Most of my friends and family visit Te Papa whenever they are on display because it's like seeing ourselves.¹²

This is clearly a significant move away from the tradition of making ngatu as ceremonial objects and gifts. In this way,

the ngatu tupenu Vilene differs from the ngatu discussed above, as it was made self-consciously as art and for sale, and has a name on it that might effectively be identified as an artist's or owner's signature. Whilst ngatu are sometimes modified to increase their value or for sale to other Tongans, they are seldom made specifically for sale to a civic collection,¹³ and the intangible value afforded them as items made and used for exchange is generally desired as part of their provenance. However, at Te Papa, where the focus is upon items 'created and/or used in New Zealand by New Zealanders of Pacific Island descent, including items which show innovative use of materials or designs' (Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa 2004b: 3), this move away from production for exchange seems immaterial.

The ngatu tupenu Vilene is thus an exemplar of the engagement of Tongan women with a museum in the Tongan diaspora and the sense of community involvement and acknowledgement afforded by the politics of prestige as they play out at Te Papa. The relationship between the women of Ilo Me'a Fo'ou and Te Papa was, and is, immediate because of the ngatu tupenu Vilene. Ilo Me'a Fou'ou used their own funding to prepare their ngatu, unlike many of the groups operating under the auspices of the Langa Fonua 'a Fafine Tonga 'i Aotearoa [*sic*],¹⁴ which receive grants from their local councils. A spokeswoman for the group explained that it was very expensive for them to prepare the ngatu and fuatanga they made, and that they valued them highly because of their personal investment in materials. The agency of the group expressed through their experimentation, and through the direct sale of their work to Te Papa,

Table 2 Stand-alone terminology.

Papalangi gnato	European linen (nineteenth-century term)
ngatu kaliko	decorated calico
ngatu tupenu Vilene	decorated Vilene cloth ngatu

is further expressed through their insistence that the ngatu they made be referred to not as ngatu pepa but as ngatu tupenu Vilene, so the quality of the materials is described but not denigrated as low-value ‘pepa’. Tupenu means ‘cloth’ in general, and can also be used to designate a Tongan wrap-around garment. The use of the term by Ilo Me’a Fo’ou Tongan Women’s Group recalls the functional use of ngatu as cloth and also refers to the use of Vilene and other spunbond materials in the manufacturing of clothing (see Table 2 for stand-alone ngatu terms that refer specifically to European cloth).

Contemporary ngatu nomenclature

The Tongan terms now used to describe and differentiate between varieties of synthetic ngatu offer insights into how they are valued or conceptualised. Applying the theoretical basis of an ethnological study of Bolivia (Nash 1992) to Tonga, anthropologist Kerry James (1998: 113) has argued that, ‘in periods of social transformation the process of change itself might be contained in the interpretations of the actors as to what is happening’. Here, the actors are makers and users of ngatu, interpreting changes in the materiality of their barkcloth by classifying them in metaphorically descriptive ways. The resulting Tongan nomenclatures describe and categorise both plant-based ngatu-making and material and technological innovations. Where formerly ‘ngatu’ was sufficient to describe all Tongan decorated barkcloth (and certainly remains used in this way), there are several sets of terms concurrently in use to distinguish between ngatu made from plant-based materials and those made from synthetics, some of which index the geographical origins of contemporary ngatu materials.

When synthetic cloth was first introduced as a material from which to make the base layer of ngatu, the resulting textiles were simply called ngatu pepa by Tongans in both Tonga and New Zealand. The suffix pepa, meaning ‘paper’,

denotes the similarity between spunbond fabric such as Vilene and heavy paper. The term ngatu pepa was developed by Tongan ngatu-makers because they wanted this innovative cloth to have a ‘traditional Tongan name, rather than a transliteration of the name for the material they were using’ (M. Drake, pers. comm., May 2007). Spunbond materials are trademarked to different companies and therefore exist under a multitude of different names. ‘Pepa’ is applied to all of these, and the ngatu made from them. Thus, the first plant-based/synthetic distinction drawn by Tongans was between ngatu, made completely from hiapo, and ngatu pepa, made with a top layer of hiapo and a base layer of synthetic cloth. These are the classifications commonly used by researchers who present synthetic ngatu forms as viable koloa within the Tongan gift economy (Drake 2002; Addo 2004).¹⁵

When ngatu began to be made entirely from spunbond fabric, rather than the cloth being used only as a substrate for a layer of hiapo, these double-layered synthetic ngatu were also called ngatu pepa. Later, to distinguish between the two types of ngatu pepa, the terminology expanded to describe what were now three different types of ngatu according to their material make-up. In what might be considered the most literally descriptive set of terms, this system classifies plant-based ngatu as ngatu ngatu. When the old term for decorated barkcloth, ngatu, is repeated, it creates a word that literally describes ngatu made with two layers of hiapo. The same layering of words is used to describe ngatu made with synthetic materials. In Auckland and Wellington, the two most common varieties of synthetic ngatu are referred to as ngatu pepa laulalo (made with a hiapo upper layer and a synthetic lower layer or laulalo) and ngatu pepa katoa (made with both layers of synthetic material, katoa meaning ‘completely’) (Addo 2004). A further variety, not commonly made, consists of two layers of calico cloth pasted together and decorated with kupesi; this is known as ngatu kaliko. Tongan dance costumes in New Zealand, formerly made from ngatu, are sometimes made from ngatu kaliko, or from stencilled canvas, but despite the moniker neither of these is properly conceptualised as ngatu like the varieties under discussion here.

In contrast with those terms already explained above, some of the terminology that has developed in Tonga to differentiate the plant-based ngatu from those made with synthetic components deliberately connotes a valuation of plant-based ngatu over and above that given to the synthetic forms. In 2004, the prevalent terminology being used in

Tongatapu referred to just two forms of ngatu: ngatu mo'oni and ngatu loi. This terminology had been in use for at least a decade prior to that: when Adrienne Kaeppler, curator of Oceanic Ethnology at the National Museum of Natural History at the Smithsonian Institution and renowned Tongan material culture specialist, first saw ngatu pepa laulalo in Tonga in the mid-1990s, it was already being called ngatu loi (A. Kaeppler pers. comm., August 2006).

Within this system, plant-based ngatu are called ngatu mo'oni, which means 'real ngatu' (the term mo'oni may be translated as 'real, actual, genuine, pure, true, truth' (Tu'inukuafe 1992: 197)). In contrast, ngatu loi is commonly translated by Tongans as 'fake ngatu', with loi meaning 'lie, untruth, humbug' (Tu'inukuafe 1992: 183). Any ngatu made with a synthetic layer can be referred to as ngatu loi. 'I call it that way since it's not proper,' one woman in Tongatapu explained to me. This system ignores the distinction between ngatu pepa laulalo and ngatu pepa katoa, calling both 'fake'. Whereas ngatu with a top layer of hiapo might seem more 'real' than ngatu made entirely from synthetics, the Tongan nomenclature reveals the dishonesty perceived in a barkcloth that seems plant-based on the surface (especially when folded for presentation) but is hiding a base layer of synthetics.

Ngatu loi is used in New Zealand as an insult. To say something or someone is loi is to suggest that they are less than they appear to be. There is an equivalent use of loi used for people. If someone is said to be Tonga loi it means they are Tongan but don't speak Tongan. A Pālāngi loi is a Tongan who acts like a fake Pālāngi. These are complex terms, with derogatory meanings, and their application to ngatu is indicative of a general dissent about the authenticity of ngatu pepa and its use by Tongans. (M. Taumoeofau, pers. comm., April 2006)

Clearly, these terms go beyond the descriptive, assigning a value judgement to the material make-up of plant-based ngatu and newer forms of ngatu produced from synthetic materials.

Yet another set of terms is used to describe plant-based and synthetic ngatu. The terms ngatu fakatonga, ngatu fakapālāngi and ngatu hafekasi, used primarily in Tongatapu, again denote the layers of cloth from which contemporary ngatu are constituted, but they do so in accordance with what might be considered geographical and even biological indexing. Ngatu fakatonga (meaning 'ngatu from Tonga') are made from hiapo and are therefore 'Tongan'; ngatu fakapālāngi are made from two layers of synthetic material and are therefore 'Pālāngi' or 'European'; and ngatu hafekasi

are made from a layer of hiapo and a layer of synthetic material, and are therefore 'half-caste' or 'half-Tongan and half-European'.

As an example of simple geographical indexing, the terms fakatonga and fakapālāngi are relatively unproblematic, assigning descriptors to ngatu according to the source of the fabrics that make up their layers: synthetic materials are sourced in the diaspora and therefore indexed as Pālāngi, while plant-based materials are sourced in Tonga and are therefore Tongan. Young-Leslie (1999: 175) observed that it is a 'common linguistic heuristic in Tonga to label things with geographical markers', and William Mariner (Martin 1981: 375, 446) preserved an early use of Pālāngi in this way when he recorded that Tongans used the name 'Papalangi gnato' for European linen in the early nineteenth century. The term mahoa 'a fakapālāngi ('European paste'), used for flour and water paste, is an example of simple geographical indexing. However, Young-Leslie (1999: 176) determined that geographical indexing does not always refer to a place of origin but can instead indicate a system of ranking things in order of preference, with the best things being categorised as fakatonga, or from Tonga. Young-Leslie (1999: 177) suggests that these sorts of terms should be interpreted as 'indices, not of exclusive, geographic origin, but of a sense of ownership and culturally based aesthetics', and that as a thing becomes conventional it 'collapses into the trope of other conventional aspects of everyday life: that which is *fakatonga*'.

The original source of synthetic materials is obviously the diaspora, the land of the Pālāngi, yet a ngatu fakapālāngi is not simply a ngatu from the diaspora, but also one that is less Tongan than a ngatu fakatonga. The use of the term in this way could be understood as indexing a 'distinctive, metaphorical manifestation of un-Tonganness' (Stevens 1996: 155). In fact, the expression commonly used to describe a Tongan who looks down on his or her heritage, favouring the European over the Tongan, is 'fie Pālāngi' ('wanting to be a Pālāngi') (Māhina 2004: 76). More than a simple observation, this may be interpreted as an insult, not specifically deriding Europeans but judging Tongans who choose a European lifestyle over what might be considered befitting of their Tongan hohoko (genealogy, ancestry), and who are thus 'doing away with tradition' (Mila 2008: 76). For women who make ngatu using synthetic fabrics precisely in order to maintain tradition, this is a powerful insult.

The term ngatu hafekasi is even more problematic. Hafekasi is the Tongan version of the Samoan word 'afakasi,

used to refer to someone of mixed Samoan and European parentage. As a simple descriptor, hafekasi refers to someone or something of mixed Tongan and European ancestry. A ngatu hafekasi is thus a ngatu with a mixed hohoko. But this is to take the least complicated definition of the term and avoid the derogatory nature of its conventional use: hafekasi is a term often used to describe something or someone that is not simply half-Tongan and half-European, but is somehow less than Tongan. When used to refer to people, it is an insulting term. Though it cannot be argued that Tongan ngatu-makers engage with synthetic materials to make a statement about the hafekasi experience, it is a recurring theme for young New Zealand-born Tongan artists. When Czarina Alisi Wilson held her first solo exhibition (Fresh Gallery Otara, 19 March–10 April 2010) she called it *PLASTIC*. Her exhibition explored her struggle with being hafekasi, ‘trying to hold on to what I can of what I can describe myself as – not what others label you by – as “plastic” ... *pālagi loi* [fake *pālagi*] ... *fia pālagi* [trying to be *pālagi*], and so on and so on’ (Manukau City Council 2010).¹⁶ Tongan artist Terry Koloamatangi Klavenes says his experience of being hafekasi ‘has often been very challenging, at times awkward and uncomfortable, sometimes tainted by loathing and angst’ (Viviaere 2007). Māori art historian Rangihira Panoho (1990: 306) has suggested that: ‘Pacific Islander migrants in countries such as New Zealand have a conflicted interest in the privileging of old and new “homes”, of here and there, that tends to make one country the site of their projects and notions of enterprise and the future, and the other the site of their traditions and more conservative values.’

Measuring up against ‘an apparent norm of Tonganness’ is thought to be more prevalent in the diaspora ‘naturally because for Tongans overseas this ideal is regarded more self-consciously and with greater anxiety’ (Morton 1998: 156). Yet the opposite seems to be true of synthetic ngatu, which are measured against a ‘norm of Tonganness’ in Tonga more so than in the diaspora, simply through the use of terminology. These terms have been in use since at least 2003, when a participant used the term ‘ngatu hafa-kasi’ on Tonga’s Planet Tonga Forum online chat room.

So, the moniker hafekasi, when applied to ngatu made with a top layer of hiapo and a bottom layer of synthetic material, suggests a system of value in which ngatu fakapālangi and ngatu hafekasi are measured against the preferred and the conventional, perhaps even the ‘authentic’:

that which is fakatonga. The complexity of these referents attests to the agency of Tongan women in contribution to the discourses that surround synthetic ngatu.

Conclusions

This paper has focused on five ngatu at Te Papa made – with one exception – since 1990. It has considered ngatu made from plant-based and synthetic materials, ngatu made for members of the Tongan Royal Family and for commoners, ngatu made for customary gift exchange or for direct transaction into the museum’s collection, and ngatu remade to meet changing requirements. Each ngatu was discussed in relation to its materiality and history, how it found its way to the museum, and the stories it tells there. Underpinning all of these concerns is the agency of Tongans to determine how, when and which ngatu will enter the collection, and how Tongan identity will be imaged by them. As evidenced by some of the more recently acquired ngatu made from synthetic materials, this agency extends to the names by which the ngatu are known at Te Papa.

These case studies were followed by a close examination of the Tongan terms used to describe and differentiate between varieties of synthetic ngatu and the insights these terms offer into how the pieces are valued or conceptualised. Tongan women are managing the incursion of synthetic materials into ngatu by coining and using specific terminology for the objects. Some terms describe quite literally the interfacing fabric used and the constituent layers of the ngatu made with it; these are descriptive terms that do not carry any connotation of quality. Yet there are other terms that are explicit in their judgement of synthetic ngatu, constituted in accordance with what might be considered geographical and even biological indexing, and used to determine the ‘Tonganness’ of ngatu varieties.

Te Papa observes the wishes of the Tongans who engage with the museum as a venue for their ngatu by referring to each ngatu in the terminology determined by its makers or owners. Thus there is no place for derogatory or derisory terms, but there is a place for locally sanctioned coinages such as ngatu pepa and ngatu tupenu Vilene, and for the expansion of terms such as fuatanga and ngatu‘uli to include upcycled and recent variations upon long-established themes. Furthermore, by exhibiting contemporary ngatu according to Tongan modes of display and revelation, and in consultation with Tongan communities and curators, Te Papa facilitates their polyvocality, allowing ngatu to speak of

Tongan identity in New Zealand with many voices, and ensuring that Tongan voices are at the fore.

It is important to acknowledge that even those contemporary ngatu that attract the most disdain from Tongans themselves have a significant role to play in the maintenance of Tongan identity. It has been observed that 'the great works of Oceanic art are those that were created when the people made them for their own purposes, to help them understand their own world and their place in it' (Gunn 2006: 16). The ngatu at Te Papa, created and named by Tongans for their own purposes, have travelled along different pathways to engage with a wider audience and facilitate understanding of a Tongan world. They are pieces made for use and exchange by Tongans – whether in the Tongan gift economy or via museum transactions and exhibitions – that not only make sense of the Tongan world but also help to construct and maintain it.

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Notes

- 1 Vivieaere was referring to the term Polynesianisation, first coined by *Metro* journalist T. Hyde in his 1993 cover story 'White men can't jump: the Polynesianisation of sport'. Sean Mallon remembers Vivieaere bringing the magazine with him to an interview session and making reference to it therein (S. Mallon, pers. comm., December 2012). 'Polynisation' has since been used and attributed to Vivieaere by numerous artists, curators and commentators, including Samoan artist Niki Hastings-McFall, who has produced a series of exhibitions using this title.
- 2 There is no standard paste recipe followed by Tongan barkcloth-makers, but the following is a recipe for a simple rice starch paste used to repair barkcloth or affix hinges to it. The recipe comes from the Bishop Museum in Hawai'i and is reproduced below in an abbreviated form:

100 ml rice starch
600 ml distilled water

Prepare paste in an enamel, stainless steel, or glass double boiler. In a small bowl, add a small portion of the distilled water to the rice starch and stir thoroughly to combine. Heat the remainder of the water in the top of the double boiler until it begins to bubble around the bottom of the pan, but do not boil. Pour starch slurry into the heated water, stirring at the same time.

Continue to stir the mixture and cook for about 20 to 30 minutes over medium heat. The paste will become translucent and thicker and drop from the spoon in sheets. Remove from heat when sufficiently cooked and set into a container of cold water to cool. Change the water several times to aid in cooling. When the paste no longer feels warm to the touch, strain it through a fine-meshed Japanese horsehair strainer or equivalent utensil such as found in gourmet kitchen supply shops. Store in an airtight container. (Rose *et al.* 1988: 33)

- 3 This information was gained through interviews conducted in Tongatapu in 2004 (informants granted anonymity). Queen Halaevalu Mata'aho was the wife of the late King of Tonga, Sia'osi Tāufa'āhau Tupou IV (eldest son of the late Queen Sālote Mafile'o Pilolevu Veiongo Tupou III).
- 4 This was a joint touring exhibition between Queensland Art Gallery, Te Papa and Queensland Museum, shown at Te Papa 19 June–12 September 2010. The wall label for the launima read:

This ngatu launima was associated with two queens. Made in 1953 to commemorate the visit of Queen Elizabeth II to Tonga. It was later placed under Queen Sālote's coffin when her body was flown back from New Zealand in 1965. The tapa was given to Flight Lieutenant McAllister, the pilot of the plane that took Queen Sālote's body back to Tonga, and he in turn presented it to the Dominion Museum (Te Papa Tongarewa's predecessor) in 1968.

The launima did not appear in the Queensland Art Gallery version of the exhibition or in the exhibition catalogue; in Queensland, the exhibition was called *Paperskin: barkcloth across the Pacific*, and the catalogue bears this name.

- 5 For diagrams of these processes, see Kooijman (1972: 316) and Tamahori (1963: 91).
- 6 The kupesi meanings given here are based on interviews conducted in Tongatapu in August 2004. In 1989, the edited volume *Cloth and human experience* (Weiner & Schneider) drew attention to the ‘importance of cloth as a material expression of genealogy’ (Kuchler & Were 2005: xix).
- 7 Tuitui soot is made in a small house or shed constructed or reserved for this purpose, by women who work throughout the night until they have completed their task. First, a good quantity of tuitui nuts is boiled until able to be cracked open. The soft kernels are then threaded onto the firm midribs of coconut leaves, much like skewers. The skewers are burned on a fire over which an iron pot is suspended. The pot is characterised as an old lady (finemotu‘a), and the rituals associated with it involve making food offerings to Hina, the Tongan goddess of ngatu-making. The pot undergoes special treatments in preparation for the soot-gathering process. First, it is ‘given a bath’ by rubbing the inside with the cut root of a banana tree. Next, the outside of the pot is oiled with coconut oil, before it is hung over the fire. Each tuitui soot-maker I spoke with in Tongatapu in 2004 stressed the importance of having the correct food to place in the pot as an offering to Hina; some use crabs, and others meat or fish. The food offerings, and the close attention paid by the women to the way they ‘cook’, seem to be a way of checking that the pot has reached the correct temperature. When the fire is burning freely underneath, and the crabs (if used) have popped open in the heat, the coconut riblets of tuitui can be placed on the fire and burned. As the tuitui burn, the women chant to Hina, asking for her blessing and for ‘hair’ to form on the pot. A successful attempt results in the accumulation of soot, hanging like hair from the pot.
Tuitui soot is used to make ngatu‘uli, chiefly ngatu associated with Tongan nobles and gifted to them at weddings and funerals. It is sprinkled over the surface of a ngatu, adhering by virtue of a light oiling, or suspended in a solution made from one of the other liquid dyes. According to Fanaa (1986: 14), it takes about 200 kg of tuitui to produce enough soot to make one launima (50 numbered sections of ngatu); this is one reason sometimes given to explain the high value of ngatu‘uli (Herda 1999: 157).
- 8 This ngatu‘uli is in the collection of Fogarty, Hojsgaard and Entwisle (FHE) Galleries in Auckland, New Zealand. The Hon. Heu‘ifanga ‘Ahome‘e was mother to Queen Halaevalu Mata‘aho, recipient of one of the first ngatu pepa made in New Zealand.
- 9 The main kupesi used on this ngatu is tokelau feletoa, a design that has its origins in Tongan lashing techniques. It encodes chiefly status through the representation of the

sennit house-post lashings of Finau ‘Ulukalala, a nineteenth-century chief of Vava‘u. Tokelau means ‘north’ and feletoa is variously attributed as the name of ‘Ulukalala’s stronghold, a village in Vava‘u where he fought a decisive battle (James 1998: unpaginated). The pattern also alludes to the cross section of the tuna, a fish considered to be chiefly. This kupesi is said to have been designed by Hulita Tu‘ifua in the nineteenth century to honour ‘Ulukalala, who was her father Tupouniua’s half-brother (Mafi 1986: 16; James 1988). Tokelau feletoa is not traditionally used to make ngatu‘uli but is a kupesi commonly used for ngatu tahina.

- 10 It is illustrated in Drake (2002: 60–61) and in Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa (2004c: 62–63).
- 11 The information given here is based on interviews with the makers of the ngatu tupenu Vilene in August 2010.
- 12 This quote is taken from an interview with the recipient/maker, August 2010.
- 13 In 2011, Queensland Art Gallery commissioned New Zealand-based group Kulupu Falehanga ‘i Teleiloa (established 2010) to make a ngatu‘uli using paper mulberry bark, but decorated with black synthetic polymer paint. It is known there as a ngatu tā‘uli in accordance with naming protocols suggested by group member Kolokesa Māhina-Tuai.
- 14 This spelling is Samoan, not Tongan.
- 15 Veys (2009: 35) also mentions ngatu loi and ngatu haafekasi, but she does not explain or analyse these terms.
- 16 The spelling of ‘pālagi’ used here is Samoan, indicating a Samoan interviewer or transcriber.

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