

6. Polynesia

Before their proselytisation, all Polynesian cultures referred to common myths of creation, the influence of which was reflected in their social order. At the top of the strictly stratified societies were families whose genealogy was rooted the deepest in mythology. Tapa was considered a “cosmic fabric” in eastern Polynesia and was reserved for members of the aristocracy and priests in ritual contexts. In western Polynesia barkcloths still serve today as gifts in the process of creating and maintaining social and economic alliances, their exhibition in great quantities confirming these publicly. Along with the colonisation of the region, the manufacture of tapa declined on almost all island groups. Since the 1970s, however, there have been several revivals of the old techniques which can be considered as an expression of a new cultural selfawareness in the context of decolonisation and globalisation.

6.1 Appropriation and Adaptation

Until the end of the eighteenth century, in Polynesia poncho-like garments (*tiputa*) made from barkcloth for men and women were only worn in Tahiti. From here the London Missionary Society started the proselytisation of Polynesia, with Tahitian catechists at its forefront. With them, *tiputa* became known also in western Polynesia. Since in the early days cotton here was unavailable to cover peoples’ bodies as was demanded by the enunciators of the new God, Western Polynesians started to produce *tiputa* themselves – in Tahitian style, yet, with their own culture specific decors which soon elaborated. While until recently considered as a mere appropriation, this process today is considered part of an ongoing creative flow of incorporating influences from the outside into their own culture.



6.1.1

Poncho *tiputa*

Samoa, 19th cent.

Barkcloth, colour pigments, 198 x 111 cm
Kew: Royal Botanic Gardens, Economic Botany Collection (42905)



6.1.2

Poncho *tiputa*

Niue, mid-19th cent.

Barkcloth, colour pigments, 100.5 x 53 cm

London: The British Museum (Oc,SLDR.237)



6.1.3

Poncho *tiputa*

Samoa, 1st half 19th cent.

Barkcloth, colour pigments, 266 x 96 cm

Kew: Royal Botanic Gardens, Economic Botany Collection (42861)



6.1.4

Poncho *tiputa*

Tahiti, Society Islands, 2nd half 18th cent.

Barkcloth, 187 x 111 x 74 cm

Göttingen: Institut für Ethnologie der Georg-August-Universität,
Cook/Forster-Sammlung (Oz 616)



6.1.5-6

Ambroise Tardieu (1788-1851)

Femmes de L'Isle Taïti. (Iles de la Societé.) 1. Po-maré Vahiné, rège. 2. Téré-moémoé; veuve de Po-maré II.

Chefs de L'Isle Borabora (Iles de la Societé.) 1. Mai 2. Téffaaora

Coloured aquatints, 24 x 32 cm; reproductions from Louis-Isidore Dupperey, *Voyage autour du monde, exécuté par Ordre du Roi, sur la corvette de Sa Majesté, La Coquille, pendant les années 1822, 1823, 1824 et 1825 [...]*. Paris: Arthur Bertrand, 1826, Atlas no.s 13 & 15

Shortly after their contact with Europeans, Tahitians of high rank started having their tapa clothing patterned. Teremoemoe, widow of Pomare II of Tahiti, here wears a 'shawl' (*ahufara*), whereas Teffaaroa, paramount chief of Borabora in the 1820s, wears a poncho or *tiputa* – both of which are painted with fern leaves.



6.1.7

Poncho *tiputa*

Niue, 19th cent.

Barkcloth, colour pigments, 87 x 57 cm

Wellington: Collection of the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa (FE000289)



6.1.8

Poncho *tiputa*

Tahiti, Society Islands, c. 1900

Barkcloth, colour pigments with incised patterns and applied rosettes
made of bast

Stuttgart: Linden-Museum – Staatliches Museum für Völkerkunde
(3572)

6.2 Tapa and Contemporary Fashion



6.2.1

Rosanna Raymond

RePATCHtriation. Customised Levi's, 1997/2013

Jeans, Barkcloth

London: Private property of the artist

London based Rosanna Raymond is of Samoan descent and was born in Auckland, New Zealand. In combining Western fashion and urban Pacific look, she has created a unique style since the 1990s that is not only genuinely 'Pacific' but entirely innovative. Inspired by traditional designs and motifs, she has created a means of expressing cultural identities for new generations.

6.2.2 Aloha Shirts

The often colourful *Aloha Shirts* – in Germany referred to as *Hawai'i Shirts* – were worn, in Hawai'i, until the 1920s predominantly by members of its lower social strata, i.e. Polynesian and Philippine plantation workers. GIs stationed in Hawai'i during World War II, and, subsequently, the Hollywood film industry, furthered their international renown as *the* 'typical' clothing of the South Seas. From the 1950s onwards, US-designers living in Hawai'i have used 'traditional' tapa motifs for their creation of 'authentic' *Aloha Shirts*. In the more recent past, *Aloha Shirts* with culture specific motifs have been designed by members of the diasporic communities in New Zealand in order to preserve their according iconographies.

6.2.2.1

Aloha Shirt

2013-09-09 Cotton, Size XL

Hawai'i: Pacific legend Apparel

Private loan

6.2.2.2

Alfred Shaheen

Aloha Shirt Model „Angel Fish T“ in the retro look of the 1950s and 1960s

Cotton, polyester, size XL

Hawai'i: Alfred Shaheen Collection by Reyn Spooner

Köln: RJM (66531)

6.2.2.3

Aloha Shirt with Tongan patterns

Aquired in Auckland 2013

Cotton, polyester, size S

Köln: RJM (66520)

6.4 Wallis and Futuna

History and culture of Wallis and Futuna are closely connected with Samoa and Tonga. Thus it is highly possible that in the 15th century during Samoa's reign over Futuna and that of Tonga over Wallis the techniques of producing and decorating tapa were introduced. Until today, barkcloth is referred to in Futuna as *siapo* and in Wallis as *ngatu*. Large tapa pieces were produced as gifts along with sashes as markers of social status and clothing. While today figurative motifs dominate the overall appearance, aprons called *salatasi* retain their traditional abstract patterns and are considered a marker of identity especially during the Pacific Arts Festival which has been held every four years since 1972.



6.4.1

Apron *salatasi*

Futuna, 1st half 20. cent.

Barkcloth, colour pigments, 141.5 x 165.5 cm (incl. fringes)

Köln: RJM (43262)



6.4.2

Apron *salatasi*

Futuna, 2nd half 20th cent.

Barkcloth, colour pigments, 67 x 144 cm

Köln: RJM (22504)



6.4.3

Mask of *pare 'eva* dance costume

Mangaia, Cook Islands, c. 1900

Reed, barkcloth, chicken feathers, cloth, 65.5 x 35.3 x 24 cm

Wellington: Collection of the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa

Tongarewa (FE0002323/1)

Little is known about the exact origin of the so-called *pare 'eva* or *pare tareka* masks which developed on Rarotonga and Mangaia in the 1880s and 1890s. Their emergence was probably stimulated by Cook Island missionaries returning from Melanesia where they would have encountered different forms of masks. *Pare 'eva* costumes were worn in pageants commemorating the actions of gods and culture heroes as well as in performances re-enacting the spread of Christianity through the Pacific.



6.4.4

Apron *salatasi*

Futuna, 1st half 20th cent.

Barkcloth, colour pigments, 83 x 134.5 cm

Köln: RJM (38899)



6.4.5.

Apron *salatasi*

Futuna, 2nd half 19th cent.

Barkcloth, colour pigments, 76 x 146.5 cm

Köln: RJM (26323)

6.5 Tonga

Barkcloths or *ngatu* in Tonga are produced by women and belong to a group of objects called *koloa*. They act in juxtaposition to the domain of *nga-ue*, which result from male agricultural activities. Both constitute an organising principle for values, status, responsibility, temporality and space. They are produced in large quantities especially for rites of passage and play an important part in all ceremonies. Tonga's society with gentry and ordinary citizens requires the constant giving and receiving of gifts of honour in which *ngatu* still play an indispensable role today.



6.5.1

Barkcloth *ngatu*

Nukualofa, Tonga, 1993

Barkcloth, colour pigments, 430 x 356 cm

Oslo: Museum of Cultural History, University of Oslo (EM 46154)

Photo: A. C. Eek

Large sized *ngatu* with the Tongan coat of arms, the aristocratic eagle, a lion and the Norfolk pines growing along the road leading to the palace in Nuku'alofa have been very popular since WW II, expressing Tongan solidarity and alliance with Britain.



6.5.2

Barkcloth *ngatu'uli* or *fuatanga*

Nukualofa, Tonga, late 20th cent.

Barkcloth, colour pigments, 458 x 403 cm

Oslo: Private property Arne Aleksej Perminow

Photo: E. C. Holte

The main designs of this *ngatu 'uli* or „black *ngatu*“ which is associated with or reserved for chiefly rank are representations of the Mailefihi-vine, a strongly scented plant also used to produce flowery wreaths and necklaces. Three of the edges are decorated with the *hiku i moa*-motif (‘tail of the rooster’), while the fourth shows a *vakatou*, referring to double-hulled canoes. The black circles in clusters represent the eggs of the *hea* bird.



6.5.3

Barkcloth *ngatu*

Tonga, late 20th cent.

Barkcloth, colour pigments, 370 x 94 cm

Köln: RJM (66484)

6.6. Samoa

Samoaan barkcloths or *siapo* are decorated with grid patterns, crossed by diagonals and filled with ornaments, either freehand style (*siapo mamananu*) or by rubbing through the design from a stencil (*siapo tasina* or *'elei*). Before the introduction of cotton, they were used as wrap-arounds, turbans, loincloths and belts over fine mats made from pandanus leaves or, in the interior of houses, as blankets and room dividers. Until the introduction of coffins, corpses were also wrapped in *siapo*. Although today they are produced almost entirely for the tourist market, *siapo* are still rendered indispensable at occasions such as weddings or the investiture of a chief. The large formats and quantities required are imported from Tonga.



6.6.1

Barkcloth *siapo mamananu*

Samoa, late 19th cent.

Barkcloth, colour pigments, 156 x 144.5 cm

Köln: RJM (7747)

The previous owner of this *siapo* decorated with template patterns was Emma Forsayth-Coe (later: Emma Kolbe) whose biography is closely connected with the colonial history of Oceania. Born in Samoa in 1850, "Queen Emma" in the early 1900s traded extensively in copra from Herbertshöhe near Rabaul, the 'capital' of German-New Guinea, and was considered one of the wealthiest and mundane women of the South Seas.



6.6.2

Barkcloth *siapo mamananu*

Samoa, late 19th cent.

Barkcloth, colour pigments, 270.5 x 232 cm

Köln: RJM (51887)



6.6.3

Barkcloth *siapo mamananu*

Samoa, late 19th cent.

Barkcloth, colour pigments, 151.5 x 136 cm

Köln: RJM (11251)

Left undecorated on three sides, this *siapo* painted freehand-style may have served as an apron or was produced accordingly as a souvenir.



6.6.4

Barkcloth *siapo 'elei*

Samoa, 2nd half 20th cent.

Barkcloth, colour pigments, 205 x 186 cm

Köln: RJM (7745)



6.6.5

Barkcloth *siapo mamananu*

Samoa, late 19th cent.

Barkcloth, colour pigments, 186 x 141.5 cm

Köln: RJM (15341)

6.7 Niue

Little is known about the use of bark cloths (*hiapo*) on the island of Niue. As the name suggests, the production techniques were probably introduced by Samoan missionaries. The art of decorating *hiapo* freehand style culminated in the second half of the nineteenth century. Historic barkcloths from Niue bear a special iconography with events and persons at their centre, thus serving as mediators of stories and images. Today, *hiapo* painting has been revived by Niuean migrants in New Zealand with the artist John Puhia Pule initially having been of important influence on the movement.



6.7.1

Barkcloth *hiapo*

Niue, mid-19. cent.

Barkcloth, colour pigments, 228 x 186 cm

London: The British Museum (Oc1953,+3)



6.7.2

Barkcloth *hiapo*

Niue, mid-19th cent.

Barkcloth, colour pigments, 234 x 253 cm

Cambridge: Museum of Archaeology & Anthropology, University of Cambridge (Z30323)