

**Creating a Nation with Cloth: Women, Wealth, and Tradition in the Tongan Diaspora**  
by Ping-Ann Addo. New York: Berghahn, 2013. 252 pp.

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This book connects discourses on value, gender, and textile wealth and demonstrates how they relate to notions of nationhood and home. There are now at least as many Tongans in the diaspora as there are in Tonga itself, and family ties form an ethnoscape marked by “Tongan” practices of gift giving. Ping-Ann Addo’s multisited research in Tonga and with Tongan families in New Zealand and the United States discusses the ways in which Tongan commoner women, especially second-generation migrants, lead Tonga’s modernity as a multiterritorial nation, creating and exchanging gifts and investing in the “creative possibilities in this tension between movement and dwelling” (p. 30).

This approach opens a microscopic perspective on the options and strategies of Tongan women and textile wealth, called *koloa*. A table (pp. 34–35) is useful for keeping track of the different types of *koloa* (bark cloth, plaited, old, shiny, large, sewn, embroidered, crocheted, decorated, repaired, etc). In brief, the love and care, the work and sacrifice, of a woman coalesces in the textile when it is created, infused with her thoughts and emotions, her mana (spiritual efficacy or potency) and skills, showing what it means to be a good, loving Tongan mother. By making and exchanging *koloa*, Addo convincingly argues that Tongan women “keep people, place, and values connected through time and over space—in a continually renewed sense of being at home” (p. 198). This is how Tongan women create a multiterritorial social universe, “simultaneously characterized by movement and dwelling—routedness and rootedness, in the words of James Clifford (1997)” (p. 18).

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In chapter 1, Addo discusses the textile genre of koloa, focusing on the accepted variations, innovations, stylistic continuity, and creativity of, and within, the various categories. Chapter 2 describes the creative group work involved in making bark cloth sheets (*ngatu*) from various materials, including synthetic fibre. While commoner women “are marginalized within the twin patriarchies of Tongan culture and New Zealand political economy” (p. 72) and struggle with poor job opportunities, they nevertheless “occupy a critical position in the facilitation of global flows and guarantee the everyday and ceremonial sustenance of their families.”

Chapter 3 presents three case studies that take a close look at the real-life pressures and strategies, the emotions and considerations, and the skills and shortcomings of today’s handling of koloa in multiterritorial Tonga. Family events, although burdensome, provide a stage for “fluidarity” (Teaiwa 2005), “creating contexts for solidarity that also incorporate fluidity between multiple social roles and social situations” (p. 115).

In chapter 4, the notion of love (*’ofa*) is foregrounded as a motherly, womanly virtue that morphs into the textile, increasing its value together with the life events that mark the exchange of these textiles. The role of the church as recipient of gifts “beyond reason” represents a particular challenge to low-income Tongans in the diaspora who cannot afford to compete appropriately and who may change churches to avoid the shame (*mā*) of underperformance (p. 136). The case studies all illustrate the need to include the reality of a modern global economy into gift-exchange considerations. Cash is now an important element of gifting practices. Chapter 5 highlights the various ways in which Tongans in the diaspora are challenged by tensions, contradictions, and pressures resulting from overlapping exchange spheres and requests for remittances. Addo presents examples of innovative strategies for handling wealth in settings like a New Zealand funeral or the performance of allegiance to church and homeland in fundraising events outside of Tonga. Koloa can be

pawned and sold and are often sent as gifts from Tonga to supportive relatives in the diaspora. As chapter 6 argues, cash can enter the gift category and gain what Annette Weiner called “symbolic density,” especially when donated at a church event (p. 174). Generous cash donations are valued evidence that diasporic Tongans are “generous, interested, and invested on numerous levels in *langa fonua*, or nation building” (p. 186).

In conclusion, the book provides a convincing case for the “fluidarity” embodied in female wealth as well as how *koloa* valuables “keep people, place, and values connected through time and over space—in a continually renewed sense of being at home” (p. 196). Addo makes clear that “at all levels, women are crucial to Tongan people’s realization of their highest cultural ideals because women produce the most important objects that people exchange, and thereby reinforce social values through ritual exchange” (p. 191). This book is an important addition to the literature on Pacific diaspora and textile wealth. Addo could have added more to the growing literature on empathy and emotion by unpacking the notion of ‘*ofa* and its ambiguities, like the idea of suffering, shame, and face (*mata*). She lucidly demonstrates how gift exchange maintains the ethos of generosity (‘*ofa*) in spite of an overwhelming global pressure to accumulate and keep gifting to a minimum. New generations of diasporic Tongan women should be studied as well to follow up on this fascinating process.

#### **REFERENCE CITED**

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2005 Solidarity and Fluidarity: Feminism as Product and Productive Force for Regionalism in the Pacific. Paper presented at “Gender, Globalization, and Militarism” conference, University of Hawai‘i at Manoa, Honolulu, February 4.

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