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I would like to thank the women in my study who shared willingly their experiences with koloa. Thank you to my committee members for all their help. Lastly, I thank my family for all their love and support.

A Feminist Interpretation of Women's Work with *Koloa* in the Tongan Community

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INTRODUCTION

Born in the United States to parents who migrated from the Tonga Islands in the South Pacific, and being raised deeply immersed in a community enriched with Tongan culture, I based my Master's thesis study on the Tongan community in the San Francisco Bay Area. The three main subjects covered for the research were women, *koloa*, and feminism. According to the Tongan Dictionary by C. Maxwell Churchward, *koloa* means "goods, wealth, riches, possessions; what one values" (1959, 270). Anthropologist Adrienne Kaeppler concluded from her research done in Tonga that the most valued and powerful objects culturally for Tongans are pieces of *koloa* (Kaeppler 1999). I identify as a feminist native anthropologist because I am a feminist who is a native member of the Tongan community that I have studied. It is my strong background with *koloa* that has given me the understanding that *koloa* represent Tongan culture. *Koloa* are a variety of cultural materials such as finely woven mats and *tapa* cloth — cloth made from the paper mulberry tree bark. *Koloa* are used for an array of cultural and social events. At birthdays, weddings, as well as church events, *koloa* are used for decorating venues, are worn by community members in the form of a *ta'ovala* (a finely woven mat worn around the waist), and given as gifts (for example large *tapa* cloth) during traditional gift-giving ceremonies (Fig. 1, Fig. 3, Fig. 4). *Koloa* are the wealth, valuables, products, and possessions of women. Women govern *koloa* and the activities, customs, and traditions associated with the *koloa* tradition. A major goal of the research was to add to

the existing research on *koloa* by showing how women have contributed to their communities and society through their work with *koloa* from the narratives of women in the Tongan diaspora community of the San Francisco Bay Area. The research was also meaningful to me because I shared my own narrative and experiences as a member of the community with the women. We expressed the same dedication in asserting through the research that our work and contributions with *koloa* are extremely valuable to Tongan society.



Figure 1. Three women wearing a type of *koloa* known as a *ta'ovala* - finely woven mat worn around the waist.

Women produce *koloa* in a variety of ways. They may produce traditional *koloa* in Tonga by weaving fine mats with fine strips made from the Pandanus tree through a long process or produce a large *tapa* cloth, also known as *ngatu ngatu*, which requires the



Figure 2. Different types of *koloa* used to decorate a graduation party. On the wall are *ngatu pepa* and a *fala pāongo*.

work of several women (**Fig. 7**). Women may also sew or knit quilts known as *monomono*, and are considered nontraditional pieces of *koloa* in their Bay Area homes (**Fig. 5**). Focusing on the work of women with *koloa* in my community, I was able to extrapolate the values found with women's work and explain the significance of these values to Tongan cultural continuity in the Bay Area. In developing a Tongan Pacific Islander feminist thought, I utilized feminist theories to describe the magnitude of *koloa* to women and their roles. I found validation of the persistence of values women have around *koloa*, primarily with the dedication women have toward their work that has lasted for hundreds of years.

My research methodology consisted of autoethnography in the Tongan community, where as a member of the community and a woman I conducted an



Figure 3. Young boy wearing a *ta'ovala* for a special church occasion known as *Fakame* or White Sunday.

ethnography from a subjective position. I utilized research methods such as observations when attending different cultural events that required the use of *koloa* and conducting interviews with women from the community that own, use, or make *koloa*.

A demographic questionnaire was administered to the women and I engaged with them in participant observations. My goal for the research was to provide deeper meanings for the values of women and their work, using the narratives of women in the community in order to describe *koloa* as a tradition rather than a product. As a feminist native anthropologist my goal was to shed light on where and how women's work substantially factors into Tongan cultural values being preserved and highly regarded, even in places such as the Bay Area where dominant cultural values prevail.



Figure 4. Tongan couple wearing a *ta'ovala* showing their Tongan cultural identity.

METHODS

I used several types of research methods to draw out data from the women. I gathered personal memories of *koloa* through interviews, made observations at events where *koloa* were present, and partook in participant observations, helping women busy with their *koloa* activities. I also used methodologies such as autoethnography, a reflexive and feminist approach, feminist analysis, snowball and volunteer sampling, and maximum variation sampling. The population of women I chose to research came from the community in which I grew up.

The two sampling methods I used to gain participants were “snowballing and volunteer” and “maximum variation sampling” (Seale 2012, 145). I used the snowballing and volunteer method by asking women I already interviewed if they knew of any other women



Figure 5. Different types of *koloa* used to decorate a birthday party. The quilt on the wall is a *monomono*, which is a quilt sewn by women made from Western materials and classified as a Westernized type of *koloa* or *me'a fakapalangi*.

who would be interested in participating in the research. Participants also voluntarily suggested other women to interview. This method was not effective for gaining participants. Instead, asking women at events to participate in the study was more effective. There were typically larger crowds of people at an event and I was able to get several women to participate by informing them about the study, requesting their participation, and, if they accepted, getting their contact information to set up an interview at a later date.

To develop a variety of women with different backgrounds to participate in the study I used the maximum variation sampling method. This method was crucial for obtaining participants because I planned to have a small sample size of women, but I wanted a diverse group. At events, I asked women personally if they would be interested in letting me interview them. I also contacted women through social media sites such as Facebook, called or emailed women I knew, and asked women I interviewed if they could put me into contact with other women who would be interested in contributing to the study. Building a diverse group of women to pull information from was necessary to validate my findings. I managed to include women who were born in Tonga, born in the United

States, were experienced with *koloa*, had little experience, and established a wide age range of women. Having extremes within the group provided diversity. The women were also from various religious backgrounds, cities, and had varying levels of experience with *koloa*. This was to produce a diverse set of data to use for descriptions (Seale 2012). The interviews were strictly on a voluntary basis and no compensation was given for participation.

All of the interviews were one-on-one. They were conducted in several locations and for all of the interviews, arrangements were made to meet at a specific time in a private or public location where the woman felt comfortable. The interviews took place in the homes of some of the women, in my home, at a church, in coffee shops, restaurants, parks, and libraries. The interviews took at least 45 minutes, and the longest interview I conducted lasted nearly three hours. On average, the interviews lasted one hour. They were all recorded using a voice recording device. The women were given a hard copy demographic survey questionnaire to fill out before the interviews, which I used to gather basic information such as age, where they

were born, their employment status and if they had children.

I attended five events in the Bay Area. The events took place at churches, a home, and a hall. Women active in their communities engage in events that involve *koloa* activities. A birthday I attended was decorated with traditional and nontraditional *koloa*. There was a gift-giving ceremony where *koloa* were given to honored guests. I participated in two events that I observed. One event was organized to promote the sales of traditional *koloa* pieces manufactured by a group of weavers specializing in making *koloa*. I worked with a woman representing the group, who brought the *koloa* from Tonga to be sold at an event we organized held in a church hall. **Figure 8** is a photo of myself at the bazaar of *koloa* products on display.

I used a feminist approach to this research by choosing only to include the participation of women to give prominence to their narratives, forming a platform for women to be active agents in creating information about *koloa*, Tongan culture, and their significant contributions to cultural continuity in their community. This type of involvement by women in the community had not been substantially documented in previous research, which also lacked a feminist native anthropologist's perspective. The criteria for participants were that they were Tongan and women. Their level of expertise with *koloa* was not my main concern since I wanted a diverse group of women. However, the women were required to have some knowledge of *koloa*. My interview questions were structured to obtain information from the women about how their womanhood was defined by *koloa* as well as how they valued *koloa*. The questions were directed toward the women to initiate answers that led into stories of experience, how their experiences influenced them, how or in what ways they valued *koloa*, and how much their values reflected their relationship with women in their families and the community. The questions also touched on topics around gendered roles, identity, womanhood, and the work that they did with *koloa*.

The point of using the reflexive approach was to



Figure 6. Young girl (center) is wearing a *teunga tau'olunga* or traditional Tongan dancing costume.

highlight the narratives of the women, making their stories about their experiences with *koloa* essential for understanding the value of women's work. A reflexive approach engages participants in the study to let their interpretations of culture, customs, and traditions be integrated into the development of accounts or descriptions of the particular culture under investigation. Their contributions to the study are emphasized where they become a focus of the study. The autoethnography complemented the reflexive approach in that I incorporated my own narrative of my experience with *koloa* rather than the research being conducted by an outsider. As a Tongan woman, it was important for me to be honest about the connection I had with my subject matter. As a subject myself, I was able to make observations and gather data that were not only meaningful to my participants but also meaningful to me, even before analysis. Placing myself beside my participants allowed for theorizing about the women from a place where we had a similar social and cultural history, lived experiences, and similar social constructions of our womanhood (Bolles 2001, 35). My ambition was to construct theories about what to study with *koloa* and women, so that information being obtained would reflect the multiple interrelated oppressions that women face, how they combat them, and how these actions were a part of their role as women. I also wanted to bring awareness to the contributions of women and their *koloa* in the community (McClaurin 2001, 62). The reflexive approach allowed for explaining the pragmatic qualities of *koloa* from the women's experiences where women viewed *koloa* as undeniably representative of their cultural identity. I also shared this same view as the women and was instrumental in highlighting this because of my subjectivity with the research. For example, *koloa* have always been a way for me to express my cultural identity. They have been a tradition historically controlled by women and they represent aspects of my womanhood (Seale 2012). I took advantage of my position politically as a feminist activist by challenging as well as altering common traditional practices with research methods used in the field by studying women from my own native



Figure 7. Traditional *ngatu ngatu* type *koloa* (folded piece on top of fine mat) given as a gift during gift-giving ceremony. It is folded and placed on top of the fine mat type *fala fihu*, shown here, for presentation.

community. This was to underline the point that anthropology has changed from its historic past of colonialism, where subjects' contributions were not noted and researchers were typically outsiders (McClaurin 2001, 62). As a feminist it was paramount to develop descriptions of the *koloa* tradition, arguing for the significant value of women's work and declaring their contributions with *koloa* as fundamental to maintaining traditional Tongan culture. As a native this was imperative for me to do because Tongan cultural identity was extremely valued by the women, as well as the community. *Koloa* are things I grew up with and have grown to value as a woman.

The use of autoethnography permitted me to stylistically textualize my experiences, along with those of my subjects, through a theoretical lens where we could interpret, describe, analyze, and develop accounts of the *koloa* tradition as a group (McClaurin 2001, 64). Autoethnography allowed me to have "transformative ethnographic knowledge production" that countered the sometimes "frozen/static ethnographic represen-



Figure 8. Display of a variety of different *koloa* for sale held at a church hall in Redwood City, California.

tations” of traditional ethnography (McClaurin 2001). Traditional ethnography is still valued due to its holistic nature and attention to detail. However, it has been found to have flaws because of biases the researcher had. As an outsider the researcher may judge the culture of those they are studying based on the standards of the researcher’s own culture (McClaurin 2001, 64). The benefit of autoethnography was that I could attempt to fully interpret and theorize about the women, their community, and *koloa* based on how I engaged not only as a feminist, but as a native anthropologist standing together with the women in the Tongan community. Autoethnography is, as Irma McClaurin describes, “blending the grounded, detailed descriptions that come from ethnography with the poetics of autobiography to create autoethnography,” which offers anthropologists like myself the opportunity to express their connectedness with the subjects they are studying by discussing experiences collectively as natives (McClaurin 2001, 71).

A feminist analysis was employed for the research because grounding descriptions in feminist theories was necessary to truly understand the values of *koloa* and women’s work, beyond the values of wealth or economic contributions. Feminist theories that were a focal point for the analysis included gender with regard to division of labor, agency as a form of self-definition, women working in the globalized world, Black

feminist thought where women of color resist assimilating to dominant culture, and postmodernism with respect to subjectivity. Theories related to gender were pertinent to the analysis because they emphasized that division of labor with *koloa* responsibilities is fundamental for women to maintain their domain with *koloa* to continue the tradition and promote enculturation. Theories related to women as agents defining their womanhood called to attention the responsibilities women have with *koloa* that provide relevant value to their gender roles and the division of labor between men and women when it comes to the *koloa* tradition. Women have an array of responsibilities with *koloa* that men do not have, that define who they are as contributors to the community and society at large. It is women who have governed this tradition historically which has served as a mechanism for women to define themselves, but more importantly to define aspects of Tongan cultural identity. They must possess *koloa* because their mothers and their grandmothers possessed *koloa*. They must be knowledgeable on how to care for their *koloa* to keep them from getting damaged. They must know what the different types are, their names, and values. They must know how to present their *koloa* during gift-giving ceremonies for all sorts of social and cultural occasions. They must provide *koloa* to their family, church, and community members to wear for social and cultural events, to present as gifts for a family member’s wedding or funeral, as well as for decorating a traditional Tongan event. They are responsible for providing group members with cultural materials necessary for carrying out Tongan customs and traditions highly valued in Tongan society. Tongan culture is constructed out of longstanding customs and traditions, one of which are *koloa*.

As self-defining agents of their womanhood, women have valued their work with *koloa* to the point that the tradition has survived throughout the years, giving women’s work authority and power within the Tongan community. Theories related to Black feminist thought, particularly with resisting assimilation to dominant culture, assert that maintaining *koloa* in the Tongan diaspora community is a form of resistance

to dominant culture (Hill-Collins 2000). Women continue to uphold their responsibilities not only in present time, but also in places all over the world far removed from the Tonga Islands. They are women doing women's work in a globalized world. Women sell and trade *koloa* on social media sites like Facebook and ship their *koloa* from Tonga to places such as the United States, Europe, Australia, New Zealand, and Asia. By taking a feminist approach to my research from a subjective standpoint I diverged from traditional research practices in the discipline to embrace new methodology. I am promoting change with conducting research and presenting information about Tongan culture that distinguishes women's contributions economically, politically, culturally, and socially from other members of society.

The feminist analysis was directed toward covering womanhood to allow the development of a Tongan Pacific Islander feminist thought on women's work with *koloa*. Information obtained from the women and information acquired from the literature review were carefully evaluated to locate areas where relevant contributions were made, addressing or relating to topics such as womanhood, culture, *koloa*, customs, tradition, and men. That information was then grounded in feminist theories, anthropological theories, and finally, feminist anthropological theories. Theories in feminist anthropology that were applicable to the analysis focused on contributions that women have made to culture that have not been documented or attributed to women around *koloa* and cultural continuity. Feminist anthropological theory utilized in the analysis focused on providing accounts of women's work not associated with their reproductive role or domestic work. The literature review was an extensive process that involved identifying pertinent literature as well as identifying theories in which to ground the descriptions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Contributing to the existing research on Tongan diaspora, women and *koloa*, feminism, and cultural identity required diverging from the path paved by previous

researchers and situating my research within the realm of a feminist native anthropologist. Positioning my work as feminist involved reviewing feminism both in and out of anthropology, grounding my research in feminist theories reflecting the experiences of women of color. Developing a Tongan Pacific Islander feminist thought involved identifying what women did to counter forms of oppression, such as assimilation (doing away with one's native culture to adopt or conform to dominate cultural values). By building on existing theories, analysis of the research focused on the ways women resisted inequalities with race, class, and gender by identifying values women had developed around *koloa* and women's work that defined womanhood. For example, I analyzed the obligations women identified as valuable in maintaining cultural identity with their work with *koloa* that defined their womanhood. I analyzed the ways the women overcame the strain of carrying such huge responsibilities in order to maintain the *koloa* tradition and women's status with *koloa*. To what extent did internalizing the burdens with their responsibilities factor into the structuring of positive ideals around gendered division of labor, cultural identity, social as well as hierarchical status, and womanhood?

Current theories and descriptions of women and *koloa* focus on production, the economic value of *koloa*, and women controlling *koloa*, with less attention paid to *koloa* as a tradition and work women do as cultural providers. It was crucial that I contribute to these theories from a feminist native perspective. My goal was to emphasize the changes taking place with anthropological research from the past that differed from my approach, in which the subjects' narratives were the main focus. I searched for literature on cultural identity and Tongan diaspora communities that did not make significant reference to the use of *koloa* in showing cultural identity. My goal was to develop descriptions, accounts, and theories based on narratives from women explaining why or how *koloa* are valuable to Tongans, particularly Tongan women culturally identifying as Tongan.

Helen Morton Lee discussed Tongan cultur-

al continuity in Tongan diaspora communities and, when discussing Tongan identity, she claimed that there were certain qualities of this identity that people in her study strived to live up to and continue (Lee 2003). Lee emphasized the importance of Tongan cultural identity to Tongan people living in diaspora communities. Developing narratives in her research from women in the community around cultural identity would have allowed women the opportunity to raise the topic of the *koloa* tradition in their conversations as a way to express one's Tongan cultural identity, as they are fundamental aspects of Tongan culture and necessary for the culture to exist.

Ping-Ann Addo and Phyllis S. Herda described traditional cultural practices of *koloa* production in Tonga of one particular type known as *ngatu ngatu*, a traditional *tapa* cloth made from the inner bark of the paper mulberry tree. Their discussion on *ngatu ngatu* production was a common theme found in existing literature on *koloa*, where *ngatu ngatu* was presented repeatedly as if it were an ideal example of a type of *koloa*. The theme developed in the literature referenced the production of *ngatu ngatu* to describe the labor involved with producing *koloa*. Discourse in the literature specifies the process of making this type of *koloa* to address the presence of a division of labor between men and women with *koloa*. The reoccurring referencing of *ngatu ngatu* production alluded to the concept that *koloa* are mainly products or material things that put excessive labor on women and not men, which is a misrepresentation of the true value of *koloa*. *Koloa*, as a tradition, are fundamental to continuing Tongan culture and are completely maintained by women. With my own research, the goal was to stress that women controlled more than just the production of *koloa* through traditional or nontraditional practices. They encountered conditions for holding their leading position with *koloa* that demanded an extensive amount of work such as production, but production was not the only condition women encountered in my study. The extensive work involved with *koloa* that women endured outside of production consisted of learning how to use *koloa* for different traditions, caring for

one's *koloa* to maintain its condition, and finding ways to accumulate *koloa*. These were responsibilities only women underwent, that men did not have to be subject to. Some of the women did not produce *koloa* at all, but they were a fundamental part of their womanhood that they valued because they learned these values through enculturation. During enculturation the women described the valuable time they spent with other women learning about the *koloa* tradition from their grandmothers, mothers, aunts, sisters, elders, and peers. Seeking to emphasize the diverse obligations women had with *koloa* brought about memories of loving moments with family or friends. They were representatives of knowledge when it came to culture because they became masters of their craft in every way, not just in production or extensive labor.

I turned to literature on feminism in and out of anthropology because the theories developed there were aimed at analyzing the work of women as contributions, a form of power and knowledge. These deeper meanings of the work women do with *koloa* can be overlooked by a researcher not trained in *koloa* activities. My goal was to use my own personal knowledge of *koloa* to touch on cultural meanings and values related to women, *koloa*, and feminism that have been previously overlooked.

FINDINGS

As a Tongan woman growing up in the United States with a mother who possessed and used all types of *koloa* for responsibilities to her family, church, and community, different types of *koloa* were not just a form of wealth, something my mother possessed for the sake of possessing them. They had other meaningful and valuable functions. In spite of *koloa* being primarily defined as a form of wealth by the Tongan Dictionary and previous scholars, I wanted to look into other factors giving value to the different types of *koloa*. I agree that they are valued and powerful as Kaeppler pointed out, but my goal was to find out in what ways were they valued by all women and how that factored into our work perpetuating the tradition over time. My mother taught me about *koloa* starting

from a young age. My first memories of *koloa* were the fine mats my mother stored under my mattress. There, they stayed smooth and preserved in presentable condition. For example, the fine mats, or *ta'ovala*, pulled from underneath my mattress would be as crisp as a shirt straight from the dry cleaners, still wrapped in plastic, and ready-to-wear. I learned this practice of preserving my *ta'ovala* through enculturation specifically from my mother. Women in the community contribute to society specifically with their work around *koloa* through enculturation because they not only teach their daughters about *koloa*, but they teach society in general through their publicly displayed practices marked by their domain with *koloa* activities.

I discovered from women in the Tongan community that they held strong values around *koloa*. Their first memories of *koloa* started at a young age; it was something they had been learning about since they were in elementary school. However, they did not realize the full potential of *koloa* because they were too young. Women generally did not internalize the *koloa* tradition as their gift consisting of womanly values that went beyond just cultural values until they had families of their own. Their philosophy around their responsibilities was that they were guardians of *koloa*. The values they held factored into their feelings of obligation caring for, upholding, and preserving the tradition. Women felt keeping with their responsibilities showed they were keeping their integrity as women. Keeping the *koloa* tradition showed love toward one's family, church, community, and culture. This involved having *koloa* at all times in case of an event. The women felt it was shameful if a woman could not fulfill her responsibilities because a woman without *koloa* is a woman without Tongan culture or identity. *Koloa* represented their cultural identity, but it also represented their womanhood and resistance to assimilating to dominant cultural values associated with Westernized notions of womanhood. Women were relied upon by their families, communities, and other women to fulfill responsibilities with *koloa*. There was a sensibility with the women that *koloa* were something Tongan women should have in case there was

a wedding, birthday, or event in the family, church, or community.

Women acting as guardians of *koloa* appreciated their position by structuring values to keep *koloa* within their domain, such as in the privacy of their home. Here they could teach family about their values with *koloa*, how they cared for it, used it, and what the different types were. It could also be in the public where they conduct presentations with *koloa* such as the gift-giving ceremony. In their domain, women relied on each other to transmit knowledge and values with customs, traditions, and culture to the community. Their domain with *koloa* activities was something they ruled and over time women have been able to maintain their position within their domain as well as maintain the *koloa* tradition, making it a staple in Tongan culture.

Despite the enveloping effect of dominant culture, women have resisted assimilation by maintaining the *koloa* tradition. However, not all women in the diaspora community uphold this tradition. One woman, referred to as Fa, explained that if a woman was to have an event, but she did not have *koloa*, rumors would circulate about how she chose to conduct her responsibilities. Women can choose to work with *koloa* when fulfilling their responsibilities to the family or the community. When they choose not to, they are accused of not showing their Tongan identity or overly conforming to dominant cultural values, which are not encouraged if those values take away from one's Tongan identity. The practice of women spreading rumors about women not contributing their *koloa* serves as a mechanism of social control discouraging women from doing away with their *koloa* and instead encouraging women to keep with the tradition. *Koloa* was used to show cultural identity or "Tonganness" by women completing their responsibilities with *koloa*. Traditional pieces that were specific to the Tonga Islands held a greater value than nontraditional pieces, even though all types of *koloa* were considered useful for fulfilling customs and traditions. When women broke with tradition it was as if they were *fiepalangi*, literally meaning "trying to be white", doing away

with the values that they were brought up with.

Establishing Tongan culture in the Bay Area was crucial to building the Tongan community. Women contributed significantly to building communities because they were knowledgeable when it came to culture and they possessed the resources essential to building the foundations of culture.

DISCUSSION

It was evident from stories of the women in my community that they tremendously valued the *koloa* tradition. Discovering these values the women shared was made possible through seeking their narratives on *koloa* and making them a crucial part of the study. There were several reasons why women valued *koloa*, ranging from responsibilities to the family to self-integrity. One reason I heard repeatedly by the women was that *koloa* represented who they were. *Koloa*, particularly traditional *koloa* pieces imported from Tonga, were representative of Tonga. Tongan culture was what the women wanted to preserve about their identities. The women valued this identity to the point that they committed to their responsibilities with *koloa* for their families, churches, and communities by enduring the labor involved, the time it took to make and preserve *koloa* of all types, and also working with other women to provide *koloa* for big community events. They valued their connection to their role as Tongan women preserving the tradition. Despite the responsibility that came with maintaining *koloa*, women willingly continued to withstand the challenges of their position as guardians to maintain their cultural identity and acculturate members of the community to do the same. One main reason *koloa* has been preserved historically by women overtime is that *koloa* are the wealth of women and they have been defined by women as women's responsibility. The Tongan identity people seek when wearing their *koloa* is definite, but the tradition also entails social and cultural values specific to women over any other member of society because they are the guardians of the *koloa* tradition. Tongan society has accepted women as guardians of *koloa* because they have maintained this culturally-defining

tradition for generations. Even though women were respected for their work with *koloa* in the community, they were not given as much recognition for this in the existing research. The stories of the women are what mattered the most for this study because they were the basis for giving women the recognition they deserved for their work with *koloa* that has persisted overtime.

Koloa are symbols of Tongan culture in the Bay Area and in Tonga. They are highly valued by members of society from the young to the old and from commoners to the monarchy. Occasions of different types, from birthdays to school reunions, consist of customs and traditions ceremoniously carried out to complete the events as specific to Tongan cultural values that structure society. **Figures 5, 6, and 7** show examples of how women use *koloa* to make their events traditionally Tongan. What makes *koloa* have great value is not primarily economic value. After all, to Tongan people it is no mystery that *koloa* of all types carry some form of economic value. *Koloa* carry significant value because they are a tradition that has become perceptible to society as symbolic of culture because of the work women do. There are a variety of different types of *koloa* that women must not only be knowledgeable of, but also own. Women must know the lengths of these different types of *koloa* and how to present them at their event for the gift-giving ceremony. For some women, this is knowledge that they have learned in school, but all of the women have learned about *koloa* from their upbringings by seeing their mother, grandmothers, aunts, and other women in the community fulfilling their *koloa* responsibilities over their lifetime. *Koloa* are necessary for completing customs and traditions with funerals, church functions, weddings, or birthdays. Without *koloa*, those events would not be traditional Tongan events. *Koloa* represent what epitomizes Tongan culture because they were made from the grandmothers, mothers, daughters, sisters, and wives of the Tongan community. Those representations of culture are what make *koloa* the benchmark for keeping with the complexities of Tongan culture, guarding customs and traditions because the women

have guarded this focal point of culture generation after generation. Women's work with *koloa* is relevant because the cultural values that revolve around the *koloa* tradition have impacted society and made known the power of women with Tongan culture.

CONCLUSION

Choosing to research as a feminist native anthropologist has been eye-opening. I was familiar with the experiences of the women I was studying because their experiences were my experiences, my mother's experiences, and my grandmother's experiences. Utilizing this perspective and supporting change from the slow-changing past of anthropology by making use of new methodologies such as autoethnography and a feminist approach, prove that the discipline is open to new ways of conducting research. This autoethnographic study draws awareness to the women's valuable work and encourages their growth. I used unconventional methodologies such as a feminist approach, native approach, and autoethnography because they were essential for considering how women were paramount when it came to cultural identity. Developing knowledge explaining the caliber of women's work over time through their narratives served as a platform for women to expound what *koloa* means to them. *Koloa* has a special value to me personally because I am a woman and they make me feel proud when I am a witness to the customs and traditions carried out publicly with *koloa* that represent my culture.

I deviated from the path paved by previous researchers by taking focus away from the economic value of *koloa* and emphasizing the strong values women have for fulfilling customs and traditions with *koloa*. The division of labor in society between women and men due to the tradition was valued by the women because the tradition was a way for them to contribute to society in a way that men could not. Describing the *koloa* tradition as controlled by women through the voices of women, shed light on the necessity for the division of labor. This validates the dominant role women have in society because women associate *koloa* with womanhood, where men are impertinent when it

comes to *koloa* responsibilities and the work involved. Men historically do not have anything to do with *koloa*, except that they wear certain types such as the *ta'ovavala* to express their Tongan identity. In places such as the United States, gaining equality between women and men has sparked social justice movements with groups of people protesting for women. My focus on the lived experiences of women contributing to society with *koloa* supports division between women and men because women can play a powerful role within their families, churches, and community through their work with *koloa*. It establishes Tongan culture for community members to engage in and identify with.

Developing a Tongan and Pacific Islander feminist thought was possible because I put my focus in finding out where women's work formulates knowledge either in the home or in public, as well as among women. I was able to understand the origin of their knowledge through listening to their first memories seeing women preparing all types of *koloa*. Women continue to distribute their knowledge to society as a resource for people to find ways to decolonize their minds by resisting Western cultural values and expressing their Tongan cultural identity. Women have cultural knowledge that is invaluable to society and coming to this conclusion would have only been possible by observing the work of women through a feminist lens. Moreover, taking advantage of my native perspective allowed me to spot the cultural knowledge women gained through their commitments with *koloa* and argue for the relevance of their cultural knowledge to Tongan society. My part in the research as a native anthropologist revealed how the empirical foundations of anthropology have changed to further facilitate women studying women from their own community. A primary goal of doing this type of anthropological work is to show that the possibilities for change are attainable and deviation is needed for innovative anthropological research.

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