Traditional Resonance: Tapa, Tourism and the Land in the Marquesas Islands

Emily C. Donaldson
M. A., Ph. D., McGill University

Chaque mois, quelque deux cents touristes débarquent dans le village d'Omoa sur l'île de Fatu-Hiva, dans l'archipel des Marquises, au fin fond de la Polynésie française. Ils passent tous dans un long bâtiment en béton haut de plafond où des artisans assis derrière des tables en plastique alignées vendent toutes sortes de produits en tapa. Des pièces d'étoffe d'écorce décorées de motifs noirs géométriques recouvrent des tables entières en piles brunes et blanches. Une telle quantité est presque déconcertante, avec quelque chose de pratiquement industriel. Les forêts dont provient cet étalage foisonnant semblent bien loin, tant physiquement que dans les esprits. Pourtant, en 2013, des recherches ethnographiques ont révélé que la production contemporaine de tapa perpétuait en fait le lien vital entre les Marquisiens, leur terre et leurs traditions culturelles. Essentiellement fabriqué à l'intention des touristes, le tapa d'aujourd'hui n'a plus grand-chose à voir avec l'activité traditionnelle de confection de vêtements et d'autres objets de la vie quotidienne destinés à la population locale. Toutefois, il représente à divers égards un pont avec ce passé. Même si l'on pourrait à première vue reprocher à la production actuelle de tapa de relever d'un artisanat touristique, j'ai découvert sous cette apparence extérieure une singulière profondeur et un luxe de significations culturelles. Le tapa tient à la fois du cadeau et de la marchandise, de l'objet traditionnel et commercial, mais sa valeur financière, certes capitale, n'en a pas pour autant occulté son sens social comme on aurait pu s'y attendre. Des pierres et des outils en bois avec lesquels sont martelées les fibres aux coups de pinceaux délicats qui tracent les motifs à l'encre noire, la fabrication du tapa est pour les Marquisiens aussi bien un moyen de subsister que de faire subsister le passé.

1. Omoa's artist market.
© E. Donaldson, 2013

On a sunny morning in 2013 passengers begin debarking from the combined cruise ship and freighter, *Aranui III*, in the bay of Omoa, Fatu Hiva. A pair of whale boats shuttle about 200 visitors from the ship to the town's cement dock. Once ashore, tourists climb into cars or walk a few minutes down the main road to a small historic artifact museum. Out in front of the museum, a Marquesan woman begins a short demonstration on how to make traditional barkcloth, or tapa. She explains the various materials involved before beating out a small section of cloth. The mechanical click of cameras blends with the ringing sound of the wooden beater against a stone tapa anvil. Under the high metal roof of the indoor artists' market nearby, rows of plastic tables covered in colorful cloth display piles of finished tapa in a variety of shades, from dark reddish brown to bright white (fig. 1). Behind the tables sit men and women in t-shirts and floral-print dresses. Children run in and out, and vendors chat as they await their next client.

As the first tourists flood the building they are greeted with platters of fresh fruit. Visitors wander down the long rows of tables pausing occasionally, their eyes rarely leaving the array of merchandise to see the faces beyond. The items for sale range from seed jewelry to scented coconut oil, dried bananas and carvings of wood, bone and stone; but tapa is by far the most common product on display. Indeed, the sheer quantity of barkcloth is overwhelming. Many of the designs painted on the fabric are repeated across products and replicated like copies by different artists, making the entire process of tapa production and presentation seem almost industrial. In this giant, echoing chamber of commerce, the forests that gave rise to these sheets of tapa are both physically and conceptually remote. The artists themselves, in their clean sneakers and heels, appear distanced from the land.

A Marxist analysis of this situation might beg the question: Is the growing industrialization of tapa alienating islanders from the land (Marx 1978:96)? In fact, discussions with artists over the course of a year reveal that the creation of tapa has a unique power to bind Marquesans to their land, culture and past. For islanders barkcloth is both deeply cultural and commercial, an unusual combination that perpetuates tradition even as it embraces modernity. Despite its status as a commodity, tapa holds value that derives primarily from the temporal, cultural and social environments surrounding its production. Independent of what Nicholas Thomas would call its exchange-based "social life" (Thomas 1991:28), tapa's cultural and environmental circumstances allow it to blend the classic concepts of "gift" and "commodity" (ibid: 15, 199). Although its commercial sale carries no social component, tapa's production represents the perpetuation of important social and cultural values equivalent to what is normally associated with gifts. As a result, tapa is a commodity that assumes both social meaning and monetary value.

This finding suggests that traditional scholarly focus on the meaning and exchange value of material things may underestimate the importance of production. A refocusing on the bonds, associations and relationships formed during the creation of an object reveals new meanings unrelated to its exchange. Indeed, contemporary tapa making and its materials represent the living of both Marquesans and their past. The following chapter investigates certain themes generated by tapa in Marquesan communities, including pride, knowledge transmission and economic gain. Each of these values illustrates the metaphorical strips of barkcloth that continue to bind islanders securely to the land and their roots.

TAKING PRIDE IN TRADITION

The island of Fatu Hiva is the most remote of the inhabited Marquesas Islands, inaccessible by any means other than boat. It is also the main producer of the traditional barkcloth known as tapa, or *'ahu 'enata* in Marquesan. Most households once made this fabric for essential everyday clothing and ceremonial needs. However, following two hundred years of disease, warfare, depopulation and immense losses of traditional Marquesan knowledge, only Fatu Hivans have continued making barkcloth. Today they produce almost all of the Marquesas' tapa, and most tapa artists living on other Marquesan islands or Tahiti originally came from Fatu Hiva. Only in the two Fatu Hivan villages of Omoa and Hanavave do you regularly hear the methodical *tap tap* of the wooden tapa beater (*ike*) against the stone anvil (*kiva*).

As a result, tapa and its production have become a symbol of pride and community on Fatu Hiva. In the words of Raquel, an Omoa resident, "You hear someone's beater, and you say 'Ah, it's so-and-so!' And if not, you hear someone else. ... Maybe in Papeete you can't beat because of your neighbor next door. But luckily this is our home, and we're used to it. Since all the houses do it, everyone is equal and everyone understands."[1] Raquel's proud mention of tapa's ubiquitous character *chez nous* (at home) sharpens the contrast with the impersonal Tahitian capital. Likewise, the description of hearing neighbors at work illustrates how the making of tapa, although solitary, creates a shared social bond through the sound it produces. The resonance of the activity effectively generates both cloth and community.

The process of making tapa, as much as the material itself, has moreover become emblematic of Fatu Hiva. According to Paloma, a local artist: "Among all the islands, it's only Fatu Hiva that makes good tapa. [...] They make it in Ua Pou too, but the quality isn't the same." A piece of high quality tapa, Paloma explained, has a particular color and appearance. It depends upon "the way of making it, too. And the quality of the banyan." The cloth on Tahuata or Ua Pou is not the same due to flaws in the bark. "Because here, when you beat it, and even when you first remove it, you see that it is good."[2] Artists take pride in not only the product but Fatu Hiva's exceptional natural materials.

More broadly, the production of tapa strengthens the connection between Marquesans and their artistic traditions. As one islander put it, "Marquesans have [art] in their blood; it's their custom and their heritage."[3] Many tapa designs are

2. Finished tapa by Rebecka Tahia Rohi features turtles and tiki that innovate upon traditional Marquesan motifs. © E. Donaldson, 2013

inspired or drawn, either directly or via copied pages, from books of historic tattoo and carving motifs (for example, Von den Steinen 1928). Drawings are often passed between generations on large sheets of paper used to transpose designs onto blank tapa.[4] In some cases, families keep certain motifs secret for fear of theft by other artists.[5] Designs are often associated with specific legends or stories, evoking a connection to the Marquesan past as well as its extraordinary artistic traditions. Pointing out how some Polynesians fear the distinctive Marquesan *tiki* motif, one artist said she instead views the *tiki* as the "body guard" (fig. 2) of her islands.[6] Represented primarily by art preserved from the nineteenth century, classic Marquesan designs include *tiki*, turtles and other geometric motifs drawn from nature that exhibit intricate detail and style unique in French Polynesia and the world (fig. 3). Thus, reclaiming these creative roots and their cultural associations becomes a point of pride for islanders.

The tools used in making tapa also cultivate an appreciation for one's ancestors. A story told by Marguerite, a Marquesan elder, illustrated this point. Her own interest in tapa was sparked, she said, when she discovered an old tapa stone in a deserted valley. After a heavy rain she found the large, smooth stone lying in a stream bed, and then "I wanted to know the story of that stone ... because nearby there had once been some houses ... where my parents lived, and that's where my mother first learned to make tapa."[7] As it turned out, that house was also where Marguerite had been conceived. These connections, and her discovery, inspired her to perpetuate the tradition. "It was then that I began to really make tapa. When I knew that story, and the answers to my past."[8] For Marguerite, the act of making tapa is both personal and ancestral.

The crafting of tapa reinforces a pride in one's origins and family that also extends into the future, since the transmission of designs and knowledge tends to occur through relations. Artists learn from parents, grandparents, aunts or cousins, and hope to pass it on to their own children or relatives.[9] Using fine paintbrushes made from their own children's hair, islanders inscribe sheets of tapa with motifs that came to them through family (fig. 4).[10]

As a result, the various types of tools and expertise associated with tapa production are not simply a means to an end. Rather, they symbolize a proud tradition and crucial link to a rich cultural past.

3. A festival costume made from tapa illustrates designs inspired by early 20th-century tattoo motifs (see Handy 1922). © E. Donaldson, 2013

4. An artist's paint, brushes and a piece of unfinished banyan tapa.
© E. Donaldson, 2013

5. A woman in Hanavave beats banyan tapa on an ancestral anvil, or *kiva*, using three Marquesan ironwood (*toa*) beaters.
© E. Donaldson, 2013

6. The demonstration for *Aranui III* visitors illustrates the three types of Marquesan tapa.
© E. Donaldson, 2013

CULTIVATING ANCESTRAL TRANSMISSION

The Marquesan forest is alive with sound, color and light as we climb a dirt road into the valley of Hanavave in August, 2013. Warblers trill in the distance, and the thick green stands of coconut, banana, mango and tannia exhale a faintly sour, earthy smell. This forest feeds local life by providing seeds, wood, nourishment and tools. They also house vast numbers of ancestral stone ruins. Due to this blending, the forest and its objects allow many Marquesans to simultaneously connect to land and ancestors. Islanders' ongoing understanding and utilization of the woods, like their use of ancestral heirlooms, honors the knowledge and traditions of their predecessors. Thus, both the materials and harvesting activities of tapa production motivate the transmission of ancestral values and expertise.

For example, many islanders view the continued use of family tapa stones as a way to respect their ancestors (fig. 5). In the village of Hohoi, Ua Pou, a young Fatu Hivan named Emelyne described the stone with which she learned to make tapa in Omoa. "It belonged to the great, great grandmas, and it's still [at the family house] ... but since my parents died [no one is using it]."[11] Emelyne explained how she was disappointed the stone was not being used, and had at first wanted to bring it back with her to Ua Pou. Instead, she and her brother had agreed to leave it at home for now, in case one of their sisters returns to Omoa and wants to use it.

Emelyne remarked that when she is making tapa alone, she sometimes feels the presence of her grandmother. She also said that an ancestral anvil can actually improve the quality of barkcloth, and the experience of making it. The old tapa stone used with an old wooden beater makes a "good ring." The old stones, she said, come from the back of the valley near ancient ceremonial sites (*me'ae*) and make a different noise, "deeper and sharper. But the other sound [from beach stone anvils] doesn't have that note. When I beat the tapa, I want that deep, sharp sound. And it's also the beater, because the beater I have – the one my husband made – is not a wood that's really ripe. It's a bit young. So the sound isn't the same."[12] Though the elders who made them are gone, these objects still transmit certain ancestral expertise.

The harvest of bark also facilitates the sharing of traditional knowledge about the forest. Marquesan tapa is made from one of three species of tree bark: banyan (*Ficus prolixa*), breadfruit (*Artocarpus altitis*), and paper mulberry (*Broussonetia papyrifera*). Each of these barks has different properties and creates a uniquely colored cloth. The darkest, almost red cloth is made from banyan tree bark, or what Fatu Hivans call *hiapo*. Breadfruit bark (*pou'u*) makes a slightly yellowish fabric, while paper mulberry cloth (*ute*) has the lightest, almost white, color (fig. 6).

Although tapa making is primarily a solitary female occupation, groups of islanders often harvest bark together, making it an opportunity to socialize as well as reconnect with the land. For some men and women this can be a rare visit to parcels of land belonging to family or close friends. Younger harvesters learn parcel boundaries and names, while their elders refresh their knowledge of the woods. Siblings, cousins, uncles or aunts who assist or give permission for use of their land also strengthen family bonds and perpetuate the island tradition of communal support. Families transmit information

about when and how to harvest bark, as well. For instance, many artists prefer to harvest around the full moon.[13] As Hortense Tevenino noted, bark is easiest to remove during a new moon, but its quality is inferior because "when you beat it, there's a lot of water inside. It's better ... at the end of the moon because it sticks a bit [when you pull it off], and that's good because the fabric shrinks. It's good, because it won't break [when you beat it]."[14]

Other artists consult the color of a tree's leaves to determine whether to harvest. According to Eugène Ehueinana, the best bark comes from trees with darker green leaves. Bark from a young tree with fresh, light green leaves is not yet "ripe"[15] and tends to be thin and breakable when beaten.[16] Similarly, another young artist noted that breadfruit bark should be harvested from mature trees that are not yet bearing fruit (fig. 7). While removing bark from an older tree with bigger leaves is more difficult, this type of harvest allows you to make larger pieces of barkcloth.[17]

Such attention to land and plants illustrates the transmission, at least in part, of the environmental interests so essential to ancient Marquesans. Reva Tevenino noted that although harvesting roots and branches of a tree will not kill it, there are limits on what should be taken. "You must pick carefully ... You cut what you need. That's why you must pick the long, fat ones, and only once. Because if you cut a tree too much, it won't grow back ... it's hard. And then it's not pretty, or it might grow twisted instead of straight. That's why you must work well on one tree. You pick a big [branch], and from that you can make several things."[18] Thus, the harvesting of bark also instills and perpetuates a customary and enduring respect for nature.

The ongoing production of tapa also helps to preserve certain traditional meanings such as the power of the banyan tree. According to historic texts, banyan tapa was once sacred, used to decorate shrines and *tapu*, or forbidden, places (Handy 1923:79, 117, 161; Crook 2007: 67). Banyan bark is still used to make a perfumed cloth known as the *aio pipi*, which women traditionally used during menstruation or after sexual intercourse (see Brianchon and Vaki, this volume).[19] Today dancers have repurposed the dark, soft *aio pipi* by twisting it around their necks as a fragrant, decorative necklace. Still, special plants and techniques are used in making *aio pipi* due to its ancestral significance.[20]

Julie, an elderly artist and healer, described how she has refused to chop down a large banyan tree on her property despite local pressure to do so. She uses the tender young roots to make medicinal remedies, and the more mature ones for tapa. The banyan "is our source of life. [...] It's sacred. It gives us things to live, and you must respect it."[21] She also spoke of how some of her ancestors were buried in the roots of the banyan tree, a plant more generally associated with the ruins of sacred ceremonial sites (*me'ae*) (ibid.; Handy 1923:114, 119; Linton 1925:26; Rolett 2010:96).

Likewise, breadfruit and paper mulberry trees also have important historic significance for Marquesans. Their ongoing harvest and maintenance for tapa production encourages additional transmission of ancestral knowledge. For generations, the three trees used for barkcloth have represented life for Marquesans; a tradition that continues in the contemporary creation and sale of tapa. The islanders' long history of connecting to land and ancestors through work and harvest helps to explain why Marquesan tapa remains true to its customary roots, despite its increasing commercialization.

7. A plantation of young breadfruit trees, soon ready for harvest, borders the road in the valley of Omoa.
© E. Donaldson, 2013

MAKING A LIVING

In the thinning, orange light of late afternoon I walk slowly up Omoa's paved main road. The occasional pickup truck rumbles past, and two young men on bicycles coast by, chatting. A reggae beat floats from a nearby window whose colorful cotton curtains shift sporadically in the breeze. Roosters crow in an ongoing relay from one yard to the next. As I continue through the village another sound gradually grows: the sharp, regular beats of wood against stone. The steady tapa notes seem to resonate within the theater-like basin of the valley, ticking off the seconds. In the short pause that punctuates every fifteen beats or so, the background sounds suddenly magnify, filling the silence with bird song and the distant ring of children's laughter. Once common to all Marquesan villages, today this sound represents not only a proud tradition and ancestral continuity, but monetary income. With the exception of cloth made for annual dance and oratory competition costumes, Marquesans currently produce most tapa for tourist consumption (fig. 8).

Meanwhile, despite some recent decline, tourism has on the whole continued to grow. Between 2002 and 2012,

8. Dressed in tapa costumes dyed with yellow paint, Omoa's elementary school dance team waits their turn to participate in the annual *tapatapa*, or traditional oratory, contest on Tahuata in 2013.
© E. Donaldson, 2013

the average annual number of foreigners visiting the islands nearly doubled, from 5,292 to some 10,500 (ISPF 2003; ISPF 2014; CODIM 2012:60, 64). Artists have adopted a range of strategies to meet these growing commercial demands. They harvest bark in larger quantities and freeze it for months, allowing them to begin beating it when they choose rather than within a day or two of harvesting. In addition to the larger sheets depicting warriors and maps of Polynesia, ever smaller pieces like tapa bookmarks and wallets now help attract sales. Artists use bleach to give some of the paper mulberry tapa a whiter, "cleaner" look. Their China ink is imported, along with the starch that gives the fabric a stiff, uniform texture. A growing local market, driven by Marquesan as well as Tahiti-based clients, features tapa dyed with bright, colorful paints from the store like florescent orange.

No official numbers have been collected on tapa sales in the Marquesas, but it represents a form of income for the majority of Fatu Hivan households. In some cases, individual artists hire local, temporary workers through a government program known as CPIA (*Convention Pour l'Insertion par l'Activité*).[22] This has allowed certain islanders to boost their tapa production volume and sales, but some small-scale artists criticize the shift towards industrialism. Bernadette remarked how "some say they work tapa but it's not even them – it's their CPIA [workers] or children doing everything, and after they're the ones who sell it … The people who work, they're occupied with cutting or preparing things. You see that they're doing the real work, while those who aren't just sit around selling it," yet still lay claim to having made the tapa.[23] It's better to teach your own children how to make tapa, she noted, than hire temporary CPIA workers. "Some do it for

the money ... [But] when you think only of money, then you will become selfish. Because some CPIA workers, they do their work but once their contract is over they'll stop doing it. They go home and do something else like make dried bananas."[24]

Bernadette's comments highlight a key characteristic of the Marquesan economy. Islanders almost never rely on tapa or any other single source of income for their living, but instead use a diversified approach to earning money. The typical Marquesan is a *polyvalent* (literally, versatile) who does a bit of everything: chops copra, harvests fruit, fishes, plants, creates and sells art, and occasionally works on contract for the town or as a CPIA. This lifestyle is driven mainly by the local scarcity of salaried employment, inconsistent access to family-owned land and the unreliability of art and fruit sales on an island that remains quite isolated from the global market. Artists sell tapa for anywhere from 200 French Pacific Francs (XPF) for bookmarks, to 50,000 XPF for the largest sheets, or roughly 2 to 475 USD. Their primary marketing opportunities are monthly *Aranui* visits and, for some thirty artists, a twice-yearly exposition in Tahiti;[25] but sales are highly unpredictable. When the *Aranui* comes, an artist could sell one or two pieces, or nothing.[26] Due to this situation and the resulting more flexible approach to making a living, islanders do not appear as vulnerable to the classic Marxist shift towards alienation from the land.

Another factor that contributes to the persistence of traditional values is the general Marquesan attitude towards money. As implied by Bernadette's comment about only doing it "for the money," most islanders do not admire individual financial ambition. Many feel nostalgic about the kind of communal living their grandparents experienced, involving layers of strong family ties, exchange and shared respect. Even younger Marquesans tend to speak longingly of how before, the entire village would come and help you build your house.[27] In some villages, communal harvests of coconuts and breadfruit occurred as recently as the 1950s.

These memories and the values associated with them help to explain current Marquesan criticisms of making money for its own sake. The wealthy and successful are instead expected to share with those in need, particularly family members. Thus mayors buy washing machines or other expensive items for cousins, aunts or nephews, and communities maintain a certain level of socio-economic balance. Meanwhile, livelihoods like tapa continue to resist domination from the lure of money, while retaining myriad values unrelated to economics. At least for now, the value of Marquesan tapa lies equally in the economic income it provides, and the traditions and respect it perpetuates.

CONCLUSION: FUTURE RESONANCE

Largely manufactured for tourist consumption, today's Marquesan tapa is a far cry from the fabric once made for islanders' everyday lives and clothing. Still, it represents a vital connection between Marquesans, their land and their cultural traditions. Tapa's key role in cultivating local pride, knowledge transmission and economic income illustrate how it continues to sustain and nourish village life in dynamic ways.

Although current tapa production could be criticized as tourist art, a peek beneath that exterior bark reveals a unique richness of cultural meaning. Indeed, the patterns and processes of its production instill it with a value far beyond its monetary or exchange worth. For a population anxious to both advance and retain a strong link to their ancestors, Marquesan tapa serves as an inspiration, negotiating the challenges of modernity even as it invigorates the past.

Warm thanks to Grégoire and Paloma Gilmore, Henri Tuieinui, and Daniel and Justine Pavaouau for their support and hospitality, and to the islanders of Fatu Hiva and all the Marquesas Islands for their time and generosity.

* This research was made possible by a Vanier Canada Graduate Scholarship.

All the references of this paper have been integrated in the general bibliography at the end of the book. You are invited to refer to it.

Notes

1. Raquel Mose Gilmore, personal communication, August 19, 2013. All subsequent footnotes citing a name and date reference personal communications. All original interviews were conducted in French and translated by the author.

2. Paloma Gilmore Ihopu, August 18, 2013.

3. Roberto Maraetaata, August 29, 2013.

4. Johanna Teupooteaa Tiaiho, August 28, 2013; Rebecka Tahia Rohi, August 27, 2013.

5. Rebecka Tahia Rohi, August 27, 2013.

6. Ibid.

7. Marguerite Hakaiti, February 18, 2013. Name has been changed to protect the speaker's identity.

8. Ibid.

9. Edgard Kahu Tametona, August 23, 2013; Reva Tevenino, April 23, 2013.

10. Rebecka Tahia Rohi, August 27, 2013.

11. Emelyne Hikutini, October 11, 2013.

12. Ibid.

13. Eugène Tiivaha Ehueinana, August 28, 2013; Tahia Rebecka Rohi, August 26, 2013; Jeffrey Naani Faua, August 28, 2013.

14. Hortense Tevenino, August 21, 2013.

15. Eugène Tiivaha Ehueinana, August 28, 2013.

16. Grégoire Ihopu, August 17, 2013.

17. Reva Tevenino, April 23, 2013.

18. Ibid.

19. Catherine Tuieinui Kihueinui, August 23, 2013; Paloma Gilmore Ihopu, August 18, 2013.

20. Paloma Gilmore Ihopu, August 18, 2013.

21. Julie Tuhi Piritua, August 18, 2013.

22. In 2013 CPIA was replaced by the similar program known as CAE, or *contrat d'accès à l'emploi*.

23. Bernadette Anapua, April 23, 2013. Name has been changed to protect the speaker's identity.

24. Ibid.

25. Leonie Peters Kamia, August 29, 2013.

26. Grégoire Ihopu, February 15, 2015.

27. Edgard Kahu Tametona, August 23, 2013.

4. An artist's paint, brushes and a piece of unfinished banyan tapa.
© E. Donaldson, 2013

5. A woman in Hanavave beats banyan tapa on an ancestral anvil, or *kiva*, using three Marquesan ironwood (*toa*) beaters.
© E. Donaldson, 2013

6. The demonstration for *Aranui III* visitors illustrates the three types of Marquesan tapa.
© E. Donaldson, 2013

CULTIVATING ANCESTRAL TRANSMISSION

The Marquesan forest is alive with sound, color and light as we climb a dirt road into the valley of Hanavave in August, 2013. Warblers trill in the distance, and the thick green stands of coconut, banana, mango and tannia exhale a faintly sour, earthy smell. This forest feeds local life by providing seeds, wood, nourishment and tools. They also house vast numbers of ancestral stone ruins. Due to this blending, the forest and its objects allow many Marquesans to simultaneously connect to land and ancestors. Islanders' ongoing understanding and utilization of the woods, like their use of ancestral heirlooms, honors the knowledge and traditions of their predecessors. Thus, both the materials and harvesting activities of tapa production motivate the transmission of ancestral values and expertise.

For example, many islanders view the continued use of family tapa stones as a way to respect their ancestors (fig. 5). In the village of Hohoi, Ua Pou, a young Fatu Hivan named Emelyne described the stone with which she learned to make tapa in Omoa. "It belonged to the great, great grandmas, and it's still [at the family house] ... but since my parents died [no one is using it]." [11] Emelyne explained how she was disappointed the stone was not being used, and had at first wanted to bring it back with her to Ua Pou. Instead, she and her brother had agreed to leave it at home for now, in case one of their sisters returns to Omoa and wants to use it.

Emelyne remarked that when she is making tapa alone, she sometimes feels the presence of her grandmother. She also said that an ancestral anvil can actually improve the quality of barkcloth, and the experience of making it. The old tapa stone used with an old wooden beater makes a "good ring." The old stones, she said, come from the back of the valley near ancient ceremonial sites (*me'ae*) and make a different noise, "deeper and sharper. But the other sound [from beach stone anvils] doesn't have that note. When I beat the tapa, I want that deep, sharp sound. And it's also the beater, because the beater I have – the one my husband made – is not a wood that's really ripe. It's a bit young. So the sound isn't the same." [12] Though the elders who made them are gone, these objects still transmit certain ancestral expertise.

The harvest of bark also facilitates the sharing of traditional knowledge about the forest. Marquesan tapa is made from one of three species of tree bark: banyan (*Ficus prolixa*), breadfruit (*Artocarpus altitis*), and paper mulberry (*Broussonetia papyrifera*). Each of these barks has different properties and creates a uniquely colored cloth. The darkest, almost red cloth is made from banyan tree bark, or what Fatu Hivans call *hiapo*. Breadfruit bark (*pou'u*) makes a slightly yellowish fabric, while paper mulberry cloth (*ute*) has the lightest, almost white, color (fig. 6).

Although tapa making is primarily a solitary female occupation, groups of islanders often harvest bark together, making it an opportunity to socialize as well as reconnect with the land. For some men and women this can be a rare visit to parcels of land belonging to family or close friends. Younger harvesters learn parcel boundaries and names, while their elders refresh their knowledge of the woods. Siblings, cousins, uncles or aunts who assist or give permission for use of their land also strengthen family bonds and perpetuate the island tradition of communal support. Families transmit information