



**ACTIVATION AND CONSTRUCTION OF ETHNIC MARKERS IN AN IMMIGRANT  
COMMUNITY**

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**Introduction:**

Ethnic markers are important characteristics for the formation and identification of ethnic groups through migration. Ethnic markers can be linguistic, or stylistic variants of everyday crafts and items that are visible and have cultural meaning. These markers, if both detectable and identifiable marks of group membership, can be used to coordinate inter and intragroup behaviors. They may be inherited along cultural or phylogenetic lines without an inherent cost. Wearable material culture, such as backcloth patterning, woven mats, and specifically the practice of tattooing have undergone a renaissance in the Pacific. This re-emergence of these cultural practices are worn as distinct markers of ethnic origin and pride, even after migration and assimilation to a new country has taken place.

We predict that there will be a greater use of ethnic markers when other ethnic groups are present and lesser use when they are absent.

**Methods:**

To find motifs in possibly active use, we conducted ethnographic surveys in the Kingdom of Tonga May – June of 2016. This was done through interviews and collection of symbols at handicraft markets and public spaces. Seventeen symbols in active use were identified by sampling contemporary Tongan barkcloth, mat, and tattoo designs. Surveys were then conducted to assess whether individuals recognized or could give names to the designs. It was also noted if the individual could give the origin of the design.

**Results:**

The Tongan data showed that there are large differences in the recognition of these designs. A great number of the motifs were recognized as being used on Tongan *ngatu* and other contemporary crafts such as weaving or barkcloth.

**Conclusions:**

This knowledge distribution is what would be expected within a homeland community. It is predicted that the most recognized designs will be used in migrant communities when surrounded by other ethnic groups. Further work will document this prediction in diasporic communities.