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## *Tapu* and *kahui* in the Marquesas

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Nowadays in Polynesia, a path leading down to the sea or a space on a piece of land may bear a sign that says *tapu*. In such instances, however, no sacredness is implied; it means simply that it is either private property or off limits to the general public. This modern usage of an ancient Polynesian concept is not a diversion of a lost notion; the word is used because it is relevant for contemporary society.

What is posited here is the notion of prohibition, which can be found in every culture. The notion of prohibition, however, is valid only as based upon the authority that underlies its enforcement, and especially inasmuch as enforcement is possible. Now, this prerequisite is precisely the possibility that a prohibition is likely to be transgressed. What is impossible need not be prohibited, and no boundaries are set where an impassable barrier is present.

Prohibition always reflects a power or an authority. This means that there are two types of prohibition, because there are two types of danger: danger related to something that is dangerous per se, and danger related to an authority that is in a position to use dangerous powers.

In the first instance, prohibition is perennial, just like the nature of the substance involved — women's blood, dead people's skulls as well as the *fugu's* liver (the *fugu* is a kind of globefish) are dangerous in themselves in Polynesia. This does not keep people from preparing the *fugu's* meat, which is a delicacy, or from having children by women or setting up rituals for the dead; what matters is taking precautions to be safe from direct and clearly identified dangerous things. Everybody has to submit to these precautions, especially the *ariki/haka'iki* (chief).

In the second instance, the prohibition is determined by an authority, rather than by the nature of things. While the path is not in itself dangerous, the penalties that are likely to be meted out for trespassing on private property may be. The nature of the penalty may be provided for in the civil code or in ancestral sacredness; it is a matter of culture and societal organisation of power.

The early European observers of Pacific societies were struck by the diversity of prohibitions that ruled human behaviour and which could be accounted for by the notion of *tapu*. All things considered, it is right to preserve the specific character of this Polynesian concept, which cannot be reduced to the Western notion of 'prohibition', as the core idea in *tapu* was always shot through with sacredness.

In Polynesia, as in many cultures, power was both political and religious. Yet, it is important to distinguish between what is in the nature of *tapu*, which has to be obeyed by all components of society as the laws of nature must be obeyed by mankind, and what is the result of decisions made by those in whom sacred power is vested and who subject others to provisional prohibitions that, to their minds, seem to be required by a political, weather-related or environmental situation. In times of food shortage, drought, in anticipation of sumptuary ceremonies, for prestige reasons or in order to save resources, Marquesan *haka'iki* (*ariki*, Society Islands) or *tau'a* (sacred, specialist priest) are empowered to impose *kahui* (*rahui*, Society Islands).

It seems that all Polynesian, and even Pacific societies as a whole, are careful to make a distinction between men's space and women's space, between the space of the living and the ancestors' space. All these spaces are like ambivalent sacred powers with which it is important to come to terms. They involve boundaries and prohibitions.

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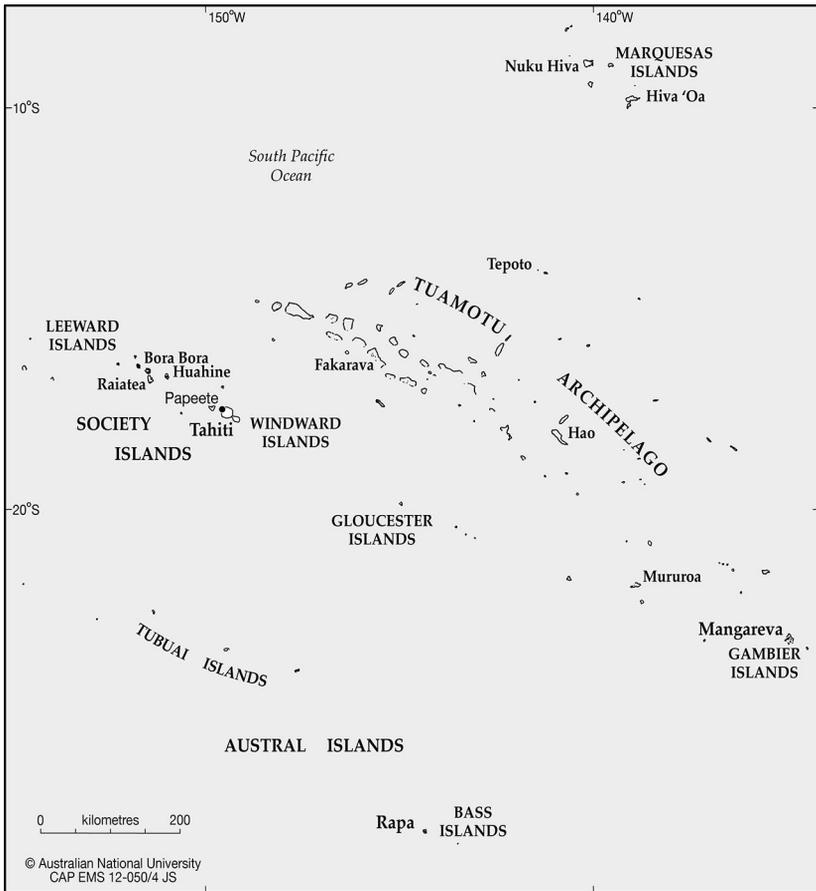


Figure 7: Map of French Polynesia

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Yet, vested with the ancestral network's *mana* (sacred power), the chiefs and the sacred officiating priests are empowered to prohibit things that are dangerous for others only because these things run counter to their will. The practice of *kahui/rahui* provides an accurate definition of the scope of their power of coercion and initiative. Not heeding the prohibitions set by the chiefs and priests is tantamount to offending and arousing, through them, the wrath of the network's ancestors. There is always an extreme disproportion between the nature of the transgression — such as eating a forbidden fruit, for instance —

and the harshness of the penalty, which is often lethal. In this instance, it is less about punishing an individual fault than demonstrating the ancestral power of the network.

The history of the chiefdoms revolves around the distribution of hallowed domains, a relatively stable distribution, and on the indirect use of the sacred powers through *kahui*, provisional prohibitions that can be used as tools by an arbitrary power.

Polynesia does not comprise monotheistic societies, and an ancestral network is not safe from another network nor is it an invisible entity that is safe from the power of another entity. One chief's *mana* can always be counterbalanced by the growing power of another chief. This accounts for the fact that the temptation to abuse the tradition of *rahui/kahui* was great in the Marquesas, Hawai'i, in Rapa Nui or in Tahiti, which was expressed through those provisional *tapu* that are first and foremost the *kahui/rahui*. They also allowed the expression of a wise power, careful to act as the best manager of limited resources on behalf of the community. In this sense, we can understand how local governments nowadays wish to use this notion to promote sustainable development.

In any case, to understand *tapu* and the *kahui* in the Marquesas, the testimony provided by European observers describing Marquesan societies must be revisited, bearing in mind the distinction between *kahui* and *tapu*.

## ***Tapu* provide a structure for social organisation**

The basic principles for the way in which prohibitions work, as they were canvassed by the French missionary and physician Father Chaulet, are presented in this way:

*tapu* is a sort of veto that can be extended indefinitely, and whose power becomes time-honored through a religious prejudice. Sometimes *tapu* is absolute and applies to everybody. Sometimes it is relative and affects only one, or several clearly-identified persons ... (Sometimes), *tapu* resulted from the fact that such and such an object had been touched by an animal viewed as a god, or by a *tau'a*. In other instances it resulted from the fact that an object had been

contaminated by a woman ... In others, it was because an object had been touched by a hallowed child ... Lacking direct means to enforce their orders, the chiefs — mostly — resorted to *tapus*. Whenever they wanted to keep troublesome or unwelcome visitors off their homes, their breadfruit trees and their coconut trees ... they imposed a *tapu* on their homes, their fruits ... The same applied to pigs, paths, etc.<sup>1</sup>

Many researchers use the notions of ‘pollution’ and ‘contamination’. Contact between substances or persons, while they are charged with diverse energy and sacredness, favour the dreadful circulation of the most powerful energy toward bases that are not always able to withstand this energy. This is relevant to women’s blood, chiefs’ *mana* (which has also been phrased as the interdependence between *mana* and *tapu*)<sup>2</sup> and the female ancestral energy carried by young children.

*Tapu* is expressed as a sign of respect; it is cautious and marked with fear of sacred things, and its main aim seems to have been the avoidance of a dangerous imbalance in the relationships between men and gods: the world of the living — the visible world (*Ao*) — and the night world of invisible entities — the world of *Po*. *Tapu* was expressed in the form of multiple prohibitions, both religious and political (*tapu*)<sup>3</sup> under the control of priests and chiefs (*tau’a* and *haka’iki*); transgressing them led to a terrible punishment, regarded as the effect of powers originating in the *Po*.

On the Marquesas Islands, maybe more than in other areas, *tapu* determined behaviour in the face of material and immaterial requirements, toward places and objects, but also social relationships,

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1 Chaulet, G., 1899. *Supplément*. Nuku Hiva; Archives of the Congregation of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary, Rome, p. 71. Father Chaulet had lived for 53 years on the Marquesas Islands until his death. He worked on documents collected by other missionaries and had exchanges with many researchers. He found that: ‘Nowadays, *tapus* being things of the past on the islands ...’, and he specified: ‘it is well known that woman is an impure being on account of her menses’. Similarly, he noted: ‘Besides, they are as scared as can be of women’s belts’ (Chaulet, G., 1879. Manuscript. Nuku Hiva; Archives of the Congregation of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary, Rome).

2 Gell A., 1993. *Wrapping in Images, Tattooing in Polynesia*. Oxford Studies in Social and Cultural Anthropology — Cultural Forms. Oxford: Clarendon Press; Shore, B., 1989. ‘*Mana* and *Tapu*’. In A. Howard & R. Borofsky (eds), *Developments in Polynesian Ethnology*. Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, pp. 137–74; Thomas, N., 1987. ‘Unstable categories: *Tapu* and gender in the Marquesas’. *Journal of Pacific History* 22(3–4): 123–38.

3 In 1791, Etienne Marchand defined *tabou* as to prohibit something, embargo something (2003. *Le voyage du capitaine Marchand, 1791: les Marquises et les îles de la Révolution, avec les Journaux de Marchand, Chanal et Roblet*, Odile Gannier & Cécile Picquoin (trans), Papeete: Au Vent des îles, p. 139).

more particularly in dealings with persons vested with a sacred character, be it permanent or temporary. This related mostly to women and people belonging to the ‘*tapu* class’ — chiefs, priests, great warriors, and all those whose condition or activity made them part, more or less temporarily, of the sacred class.<sup>4</sup> While these persons were set apart from the rest of society, the head was always *tapu*.<sup>5</sup> It was the same for the first born in a family, people in contact with blood, those engaged in a ‘dangerous’ activity or one relating to the public interest, for example, preparations for war, preparing bodies for burial, preparing ink for tattoos, or fishing.<sup>6</sup>

Transgressing those multiple prohibitions meant being exposed to death or to serious diseases, such as leprosy and blindness, and it could disturb the community’s existence by adversely affecting the normal

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4 ‘When there was a major celebration in a tribe, by reason of some important occurrence, foreign guests were *tapu* for the whole duration of the feast, but as a precautionary measure, they came armed, for once the celebration was over and the *tapu* lifted, sometimes ambuscades were set to trap them on their way back home’ (Rollin, L., 1974 (1929). *Moeurs et coutumes de anciens Maoris des îles Marquises (Les îles Marquises; Géographie, Ethnographie, Histoire, Colonisation et mise en valeur)*. Papeete: Stepolde, p. 87). ‘When there is some human victim to offer to the gods, the *moas*, or priests’ servants, remaining permanently on the sacred grounds, could neither sleep with women nor have intercourse with them; nor were they allowed to enter secular huts, that is, islanders’; when they go for food to the natives’ homes, they stay at the foot of the paving stones on which the huts are built. Behaving in any different way would invariably expose them to being killed by the gods’ (Chaulet, 1873–1900. *Notices géographiques, ethnographiques et religieuses sur les îles Marquises*. Manuscript, Catholic diocese, Nuku Hiva; Archives of the Congregation of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary, Rome, p. 152).

5 ‘The head being very sacred, it must not be touched by hands or covered by anything whatsoever; nor was throwing anything over it allowed’ (Chaulet, 1899, p. 73); K. von den Steinen illustrates through one of his observations the way implications were intertwined. He sought testimonies allowing him to follow the development of the island’s arts. When he was in a position to study a complex headgear, he was very anxious to observe it with more precision and hoped to acquire it. The *paekēa*, which ‘from its style ... seemed to be ... the most ancient... was not for sale. I could take only two pictures of it before the woman yanked it off my hands. I made a gambit with the generous offer of a small piece of land ... this attempt failed miserably ... Because the land had been trampled by women’s feet, and thus the head *tapu* would have been transgressed in an indirect way’ (2005, 2008 (1925–28). *Die Marquesaner und ihre Kunst. Studien über die Entwicklung primitiver Südseernamentik nach eigenen Reiseergebnissen und dem Material der Museen* vol. 2, *Plastik*, p. 20).

6 ‘The fisherman must fast three days and practice continence until the net goes to the sea for the first time. When it does, the fisherman’s wife must fast and stay inside her hut. Those who go for reeds or bamboos to make torches for fishing *aku* must refrain from spitting and from relieving themselves on that location; otherwise they won’t catch any *aku* and they would be wounded by this fish’ (Chaulet, 1899, p. 74). The *aku* is the tropical needlefish, or garfish, belonging to the *belonidae* family; a fish with a long snout.

course of life. Oral literature, like travellers' testimonies, reveals that faith in *tapu's* power was such that *tapu* could kill through the mere acceptance of this power.

Some resources, which could vary from tribe to tribe, and depending on locations, were the object of a long-term prohibition (turtles, sea rays, red animals or plants) or a short-term prohibition aimed at controlling their use or in anticipation of specific events, times of scarcity, building or any other decision. Thus, there were temporary *tapu* called '*ahui*,<sup>7</sup> or *kahui*, on fishing if fish became scarce, on breadfruit trees, whose fruit was supposed to fill up the silo pits ('*ua ma*), community reserves or, prior to major feasts, on some coconut trees, banana trees or other plants meant for a specific use.

As prohibitions ruled life, they were bound to be numberless, especially as they were complemented by many 'precautionary principles'; they dictated behaviour as surely as etiquette ruled life at the court of Louis XIV.

Social organisation and *tapu* were closely linked, as Testard de Marans, the government's representative, testifies:

It is impossible to list even the major instances of *tabu* here; they vary from island to island, and even from valley to valley. We are seeking out only those that are common to all points in the Southeast and which are the best known. Some are not dependent on the chiefs' authority; others, which, they decided, are either everlasting or temporary, and

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7 '*uhi'i te' ahui*: slap a *tapu*, a prohibition on' (Dordillon, R.I., 1904. *Grammaire et dictionnaire de la langue des îles Marquises*. 2 vols. Paris: Imprimerie Belin Frères). In response to questions posed in the 1970s by ethnologist H. Lavondès to the elders on Ua Pou Island, they answered: 'Many were the things that were *tapu* here on Ua Pou. For some people, white pigs were *tapu*, for others dogs were, for others still, it was the *kaki'oa* (the red-footed gannets); some fish were *tapu*, the *utu*, the *humu* ... and the *puko'oko'o*. It was *tapu* to walk under a house. Numerous places were *tapu*. Nowadays, it's over, it's all over with those senseless *tapus*. Who is to credit for this? The missionaries, for thanks to them, who taught us the word of truth, the God of truth, Christian customs, the country has improved' (1975. 'Terre et mer; pour une lecture de quelques mythes polynésiens'. PhD thesis. Université Paris Descartes). Greg Denning mentions action by four *haka'iki* from Taiohae who, on 17 January 1834, taking the population by surprise, 'imposed *tapu* on Sunday, the Lord's Day. The whole valley hummed with the excitement of preparations, for on that day no fire was supposed to be built, and *tapa* was not supposed to be pounded. Old customs were of use to the new ones' (Denning, G., 1980. *Islands and Beaches: Discourse on a Silent Land: Marquesas 1774–1880*. Chicago: The Dorsey Press, p. 178). This action, certainly, is not to be disregarded as it seems to reveal support for the missionaries, since Sunday meetings, according to Denning 'caused great humiliation to the missionaries. They also suffered from not being able to lead a regular life and from lacking silence, which is conducive to meditation' (p. 178).

they have a general or private interest; finally, some apply specifically to women. Although the latter are less important now, they lived on despite the missionaries' endeavors and French occupation.<sup>8</sup>

Public *tapu*, which apply even to the chiefs, are those that made sacred woods and tombs inviolable, prevented the people from walking across the plantations before harvest and from touching certain trees before their fruits were ripe. They are perpetual or temporary depending on how important they are. The Marquesan chiefs and the European authorities themselves were sometimes slapped with a *tabu* as need be.

To these temporary *tabu* are linked the restrictions set on relations between people in good health and lepers (a French prohibition), and Marquesan prohibitions on contact with sick people who are fatally ill or regarded as such, women in childbirth or at the critical junction, the people who bury the dead,<sup>9</sup> and recently circumcised people.

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8 Testard de Marans, A., 2004. *Souvenirs des îles Marquises. Groupe Sud-Est, 1887–1888*. Paris: Publication de la Société des Océanistes, no. 45, Musée de l'Homme, chap II.

9 Chaulet observed the following *tapu* related to death:

*Tapu* which has to be observed when a corpse is being dried: *haka pa'a*.

1. The women who manufacture cloths which must be used either to cover a corpse that has to be dried, either to wipe off its putrid humors, or to decorate its casket, must beat it while fasting. Besides, they must refrain from smoking a pipe, from putting on fragrances or pomade, from wearing a belt, from lust and from living in with their husbands.
2. It is forbidden to take something from the hut where the corpse is being dried (such as a dish, fire, pipe, food).
3. It is forbidden to take anything from one of those who are taking care of drying the corpse.
4. Those who are taking care of drying the body are prohibited from any work (such as climbing up breadfruit trees, coconut trees, fishing, going for wood, lighting a fire, fixing or cooking food ...).
5. They are also prohibited from touching anything; thus, they must be fed; somebody must give them drinks or a smoke.
6. They are also prohibited from putting on fragrances or pomade, and even more so from fornicating and from walking out of this hut to go somewhere else. (When they want to bathe, they must do it at night without anybody seeing them.)
7. Libertines (*ka'ioi*) are prohibited from entering the hut where a corpse is being dried.
8. Whenever the person who is drying a body breaks one of these *tapus*, the dead person's body bursts up and there no longer is any possibility of having it dried, and the dead person's spirit must inflict diseases on him/her as punishment for the lack of faithfulness.
9. The person who is drying a body must observe these *tapus* for three months if the deceased is a chief (the same applies for big female chiefs), two months if the deceased is an ordinary chief, and one month if he is a commoner. But for this person to be allowed to touch a dish, a pipe or any other thing without prohibiting others from touching it, he/she must first purify himself/herself with water, taking a bath and ending *tapus*. (Chaulet, 1879, pp. 180–81)

Another temporary *tabu*, but a public one, is the *tabu* on picking *mei* (breadfruit fruit) from the breadfruit tree when it has been noticed that the amount of *mei* is decreasing and savings are required to avert scarcity.

Among perpetual *tabu* are those that protect priests, tribe chiefs and heads of families whose person was sacred, but nowadays these *tabu* are much less binding. Marriages between direct relatives are also prohibited by this law, which in this instance is in agreement with the French civil code. The enemy who has been invited to a *koika*, and who thus is inviolable, is *tabu* during the feast. Also *tabu* is a foreigner who has become a Marquesan's *inoa* by switching names with him, the hut of a *taua* when he nurses a sick person, and cemeteries and ancient burying places.

Private *tabu* can also be imposed by any individual and, in this way, he can, even for a trivial motive, such as access to his hut or to his enclosure, prohibit the use of some things belonging to him, or isolate another person from himself. For that purpose, it is enough to wrap the object in a bond made of a braided coconut leaf, a grass bouquet or *tapa* scraps. Such private *tabu* can be encountered regularly, especially on coconut trees and breadfruit trees whose fruits are forbidden to the general public.<sup>10</sup>

Many conventional *tabu* have lapsed now. The prohibition against wearing red *tapa* belts is no longer in force, as is the *tabu* that prohibited entering the places where offerings to the gods were made or the places where chiefs and priests had their meals. The *tabu* that prohibited going out after a chief or a high priest died before somebody had been offered as a sacrifice has also lapsed. Prohibitions relating to chiefs are losing their force by the day and respect due to their person is greatly weakened. It is not the same, however, of *tabu* relating to children; they are, with few exceptions,<sup>11</sup> still strictly observed by the

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10 A man of around 60 years of age, Kohu, recalls that trees or shrubs, such as the lemon tree (*Citrus aurantifolia*), mango tree (*Mangifera indica*), or tamarind tree (*Tamarindus indica*), can be protected by a *kahui*. For that purpose, the tree was wrapped in a coconut tree leaf (testimony collected by Edgar Tetahiotupa).

11 Teupoo, a mother, explains that, when she was a young girl in the Marquesas, her mother insisted the children's clothes, whether boys or girls, had to be on top of the linen pile and that the boys' clothes always had to be on top of the girls' (Tetahiotupa).

Marquesans. It is absolutely prohibited to touch a child's head<sup>12</sup> before he has reached adulthood, or to walk over him, even if he is lying in the way or across the threshold; only the mother is allowed to cut his hair, and it must be disposed of carefully by burial in a secret location. For Marquesans, hair is sacred and, regardless of the individual's age, the individual must pick it up when it is cut, wrap it in a piece of cloth and throw it into the sea as soon as possible.<sup>13</sup>

Tradition, represented by *tabu*, prohibits Marquesans from switching names with animals, from spitting in the middle of a hut, from dropping coconut milk on the ground while drinking and *popoi* while eating, from smoking a chief's pipe, from killing some birds, and from eating some fish.<sup>14</sup>

*Tabu* applying specifically to women are the most terrible. Initially, they must have been placed for sanitary reasons and inspired by ideas of cleanliness and purification. There are strong reasons to believe that they will survive for a very long time, for they are too strongly ingrained to become obsolete. Women are *tabu* for a period each month

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12 Teupoo remembered that the head, in Marquesan culture, was sacred: 'There was a maid for the face and one for the rest of the body. Just like the head, the pillow had that sacred character; the most offensive thing for a person was the fact that somebody could sit on his or her pillow. The same applied to a baby being laid on a couch. Before doing that, it was necessary to cover the couch' (Tetahiotupa).

13 Father Delmas, writes, regarding hair: 'The father does not cut his daughter's hair and the daughter does not cut her father's hair. The wife does not cut the husband's hair but the husband can cut the wife's hair. The father can also cut the child's hair but not the daughter's. It is strictly forbidden. The mother does it.' (Manuscript. Archives of the Congregation of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary, Rome)

14 In 1884, Davin pointed out among the ways *tapu* applied: 'Birds are very rare in the Polynesians archipelagoes; in the forests on these islands there is a sort of nightingale called *komako* in the native language: a 15-franc fine was decreed against any individual convicted of having killed or taken one' (1886. *50 000 miles dans l'Océan Pacifique*. Paris: E. Plon, Nourrit & Cie, p. 237). In 1974, Jean-Claude Thibault also noticed during his research on birds that 'many places were sacred and prohibited, such as some sea bird colonies ... '. Around 10 years later, Ottino-Garanger had the same findings relating to valley zones, for example, or for structures protected by reflexes, recommendations and precautions, as is the case for some gestures toward canoes, for example, or plants.

and regarded as impure by reason of her condition.<sup>15</sup> The Marquesans claim that he who touches, even inadvertently, a trace of blood, soon develops a disease contracting the joints, especially in the hands and feet. Such is the explanation propounded for leprosy. Only women, and only adult women, can touch what is part of a woman's outfit, and her clothes are *tabu* for children. In the past she was forbidden from sitting on the hut's threshold; she had a special mat to lie on and she ate alone. Except in very rare occasions, women were not allowed to enter canoes, for their presence was said to make the fish scamper. If women were ever allowed on a whaleboat, they had to refrain from sitting on or in it when the craft was towed from dry land.<sup>16</sup>

The community as a whole lived under the sway of some *tapu*, especially during certain periods or while performing specific activities, as Lavondès<sup>17</sup> notes: 'What could be called ceremonial *tapu* consisted in consecrating the whole tribe during tribal rites or tribal group activities such as fishing. In this kind of period, all usual everyday activities — work, food preparation, entertainment, trips in the valley and making any kind of noise — were prohibited.'

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15 L. Tautain, doctor and administrator, wrote: 'calling a woman impure during childbirth, calling blood during menses specifically impure and a cause for leprosy, calling women generally impure *per se*, prohibiting sexual intercourse under some circumstances do not seem to us to run counter to the idea that there exists a genesis-related cult ... On the other hand, we must note that while the blood during menses is impure, it does not at all preclude living in the same place; nor does it preclude the fact that while a woman is impure during the days that precede and follow the baby's delivery, she can have intercourse with her husband soon after the baby is delivered. These issues relating to impurity are the result of myth-related attempts to account for some physiological phenomena: this is an explanation that occurs besides, and not against, the generation cult' (1896. 'Notes sur l'ethnographie des îles Marquises'. *L'Anthropologie* 7: 547–48). At this point a reminder is in order. It is important to remember to what extent the notion of impurity is relevant for our study: this blood is powerful — a lifeblood — and therefore dangerous, but not impure; otherwise, how could we understand this incredible Marquesan custom: 'While a high-society girl is giving birth for the first time, major male relatives prostrate themselves in such a way that the young woman is sitting on their heads as the baby is delivered; they are all covered with the same sheet' (Crook, P., 1990. *Life in the Marquesas Islands, Missionaries' Narratives, 1797–1842*. Uvea-Wallis, published by Te Fenua Foou, 1990, p. 13); 'If the sick woman is an *atapeiu*, a matron bites off the newborn's cord, those who attend the scene get the squirting blood on their heads, and the blood must touch only one sacred object' (that is, *ha'a-te-pe'i'u*, a woman of noble birth, Radiguet, M., 1978 (1860). *Les Derniers Sauvages: Souvenirs de l'occupation française aux îles Marquises, 1842–59*. Tahiti: Les Éditions du Pacifique, p. 126.) Blood could also be drunk and not a drop should fall on the ground (Tetahitupa).

16 'Canoes are taboo for women, and women are prohibited from boarding them when they are afloat, and even from touching them when they are towed on dry land. The taboo extends to the masts, the outrigger, etc., although these objects can be collected in huts or under hangars (sic). People maintained that this taboo is still valid all over the islands' (de Roquefeuill, C., 1818. t.1, p. 324).

17 Lavondès, H., 1975, pp. 308–09. Lavondès worked in the Marquesas in 1963, up to 1971, and thereafter devoted several years to research on the subject.

According to Dordillon, the practices that were strictly forbidden during such periods were dabbing coconut oil and 'ena (*Curcuma longa*) on the body, using weapons, playing the spinning top game, noisy laughter, raising one's arms above one's head, wearing coloured fabrics, eating *mei*, bathing'.

By contrast, in numerous other instances, prohibitions related to specific places, times, or categories of people. The conditions, or the spirit, under which prohibitions could be decreed are briefly described by Rollin:

As the chief was inspired by the commonweal, after the council's opinion, he proclaimed temporary prohibitions on certain plants or animals which required protection and handling with care. This prohibition, called *kahui*, was signaled by a pole with some fruits from the forbidden tree<sup>18</sup> hanging and a shred of white fabric (*tapa*). Violations were severely punished, more often than not by way of a punishment of the supernatural kind. The culprit, terrified by the punishment which he had courted, would unconsciously betray himself during the investigation and, when the time came, a priest secretly had him poisoned or bruised.<sup>19</sup>

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18 Kohu recollected: 'In the past, when we wanted to do *ma*, we did a *kahui*. We took a shrub with many branches on it, and on the branches we stuck pieces of young aborted *mei* fruit which we had picked from the ground. We planted the shrub at the valley's entrance to indicate it was *tapu*, that *kahui* was imposed' (Tetahiotupa).

19 Rollin, 1974, p. 83. 'All diseases were viewed as sent by the gods, either as punishment for *tapu* breaking or as performance of an evil spell. Leprosy was perceived as a punishment for contact with menses blood. Insanity struck those who ate forbidden fruit — *tapu*. Abscesses occurred on those who ate fish reserved for the priests. Diarrhea was caused by 'jettatore'. Babies' illnesses were caused by harmful ghosts ...' (Rollin, L., 1928. 'La maladie et la mort chez les anciens Maoris des îles Marquises'. La Presse médicale, 1er décembre 1928, no. 96, pp. 3–4). Rollin was the islands' doctor from June 1923 through April 1928, and administrator from July 1929 through August 1930. In the 1840s, F.X. Caillet reported: 'I think at least half the Marquesas lands are 'tabooed' to women. Anywhere there were chiefs' corpses, women had to take long ways around, which made their trips in the mountain very long. Still, taboos were well observed, for poison punished them for their sacrileges, and this poison, called *Eva* [*Cerbera manghas* L], was, according to the *Tahua*, sent by God' (1930. 'Souvenirs de l'occupation des Marquises en 1843'. *Bulletin de la Sté des Études Océaniques* (B.S.E.O.) 38(4): 95). Chaulet noted, among many other facts: 'Female commoners can be tattooed only in solitary and very thick places, for if, through bad luck the gods came to see this desecration, they would have to send either a big food scarcity or a big famine to punish them' (1873–1900).

De Marans describes the place of *tapu* in late nineteenth-century social dispensation:

*Tapu* seems to have single-handedly made up the code that was used to rule the Maori tribes. This almighty word summed up both the moral law and the economic law that governed the peoples on the Marquesas Islands. *Tapu* was a decree relating to total prohibition and to less strict prohibitions, and it had negative virtues that imposed a host of deprivations on the natives. Its principle and its essence seemed to be either specific usefulness or general usefulness which shielded this prohibition that was valid for all. For that matter, *tapu* was deemed the expression of the gods' will conveyed to the people through the priests and the chiefs.

Indeed, it was especially up to the priests and chiefs to impose *tabus*; in this valuable privilege they could find a way to control minds that were ignorant, naive and credulous, and to take unfair advantage of the simple-minded and the weak by imposing their wills, both good and bad. The priests and the chiefs used this right as a tool for despotism to the benefit of their passions and whims.

Some *tabus* settled only issues relating to etiquette, which however, are too numerous to observe in the relationships between the *kikino* and the *hakaiki* on the one hand and the *taua* on the other hand. Other *tabus* were absolute orders outside the will of even the priests and chiefs. They themselves had to submit to those *tabus*. Finally, most *tabus* were relative and contingent only on the chiefs and priests who imposed them or lifted them at will, either for the public good or to increase their influence and their absolute domination. In such cases, *tabus* were imposed by proclamation either by the chief or by the high priest; they concerned a person or a piece of land, or prohibited the use of some objects.

From this brief survey we can get a notion of the numberless *tabus* that existed in the past. There were so many of them that they were often violated unbeknownst to those who committed the violation. The violation, revealed to the public by way of huge disasters and heavenly wrath,<sup>20</sup> almost invariably led to the death of the individual deemed guilty of having transgressed the terrible prohibition. Revocation of prohibitions was very difficult and required big sacrifices. Children, however, kings of the Pacific, seemed to have had the right to lift *tabu* in some cases. Nowadays, a great number of *tabus*

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20 It would be more accurate to say 'the wrath of the *Po* entities', as they have nothing to do with the Christian Heaven.

are still valid; if a stranger, who is not supposed to be familiar with them, got it into his head to violate them, he will not be bothered by the natives, but his relationships with them will become difficult, for he has deeply offended them.<sup>21</sup>

Navy doctor J. de Comeiras visited the area in the 1840s, noting:

Generally speaking, *tapu*, among those peoples, is a substitute for laws and institutions ... *tapu*, or prohibition, usually has a purpose related to usefulness or hygiene; so it extends to fruits at certain periods; another example is the fact that a man cannot have intercourse with his wife until a long time after her baby is delivered ... *Tapus* extend to the most ordinary everyday things; they are invoked by the natives at every turn, and it seemed to us, laymen, that they were devised on purpose to inflict permanent torment on those children of nature ... The high priest, on all islands in the archipelago, has a great influence with individuals ... his ministers, who tend to the wounded during combat, are called *Moas*; they get orders from their chief, to whom they show total obedience. The high priest is also the one who imposes a taboo on food, on the season's fruits, etc. ... His jurisdiction, as we can see, is very extensive, and as his orders originate from the godhead, nobody would dare disobey them.<sup>22</sup>

Also during the 1840s, Admiral Dupetit-Thouars' secretary, Max Radiguet, noted: 'Each owner ... seems to have also the right to impose *tapu* on his home and on its contents, as shown by the grass bouquets and the white banners, *tapu* symbols which are used to mark huts, enclosures, canoes, and even trees ... '.

A few decades later, Chaulet recorded these details:

When the Marquesans want to prohibit some people from taking up coconuts to a piece of land, they tie to one of the coconut trees on the land either a piece of native fabric or a piece of coconut leaf, to which they hang a coconut. They act in the same way when they want to prohibit taking breadfruit tree fruits and when they want to prohibit fishing in a certain place; on the very spot they plant a long pole adorned with banners. When they want to prohibit pig hunting in some place, they put a coconut tree leaf on a stone near the path and

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21 Testard de Marans, 2004. At the time, the words *kikino* or *po'i kikino* referred to commoners, *haka'iki* referred to chief and *tau'a* referred to an eminently holy person whose opinions to a great extent ruled the community's life.

22 de Comeiras, J.R.A., 1846. *Topographie médicale de l'archipel de la Société et des Iles Marquises*. Montpellier, Printed by J. Martel aîné, pp. 64–65, 94.

cover it with another stone to keep it from being blown away by the wind. Such are, across the Marquesas Islands, Marquesan posters, called *'ahui* in the vernacular ... When a chief wants to prevent his subjects from exporting *ma* to another district, he hallows the paths and the sea lanes and devotes them to the head of some important chief, and henceforth, communication is prohibited, or *tapu*. To have this *tapu* lapse, a hog must be offered to the gods: *mea papae 'a'anui*.<sup>23</sup>

As the Western presence increased, de Marans wrote in 1889:

Private *tabus* may be imposed by any individual. In this way, he can, even for a futile motive, keep off others from his hut or his enclosure, prohibit the use of some objects belonging to him, or keep a person away from him. For that purpose, it is enough to wrap the object in a bond made of a braided coconut leaf, a grass bouquet or *tapa* scraps. Such private *tabus* can be encountered very often, especially on coconut trees and breadfruit trees whose fruits are off limits to the general public.

This ability to decide the fate of an object, a place or a person, came to be used by all, both Polynesians and Westerners.

Regarding the inevitable association, or agreement, in decision-making between the representatives of the religious world and the powers that be, de Roquefeuil, who was in the region during 1818–19, has this to say:

One object is taboo in one valley and not in the neighboring one, one object is taboo today whereas it was not taboo a year ago. These prohibitions apply only at the priests' will; but to become valid all across a tribe, the priests' proposal must be agreed to by the chiefs. A priest declares he had got in touch with one of his colleagues or a deceased chief who became *etoua* (god) in the next world, by virtue of the rank he had here and now. The spirit told him that he would make the impact of its will felt by any individual who ate pork with such and such a brand, by any woman who touched a certain weapon or any other object meant to be used by men; henceforth, the animal or the object in question become taboo.<sup>24</sup>

23 Chaulet, 1873–1900, p. 96; see also Radiguet, 1978, pp. 116–17.

24 de Roquefeuil, C., 1823. *Journal d'un voyage autour du monde pendant les années 1816, 1817, 1818 et 1819*. 2 vols. Paris: Ponthieu, Lesage, Gide fils, pp. 325–26. P.A.

Regarding this power held by social and religious leaders on the islands, Rollin, on the basis of research and from what his Marquesan patients and the citizens under his administration told him, wrote this:

Among the chief's functions was that of enforcing *tapus* ordained by the *taua*. He was the one to perform the routines, but the high priest pulled the wires. The *taua* and *hakaiki* were often relatives, but even when that was not the case, they were united by their common interests, and *tapus* were always favorable to them ... *Tapus* were the only law. Each acted as he pleased as long as he obeyed *tapus*. The *kikino* himself was free to change tribes at will, at his own risk, of course. *Tapus* were ordained by the *taua* and enforced by the chief, assisted by his *toa*; the *toa*, in peace time, acted as a club-happy police officer. Breaking *tapus* led to a terrible punishment, more often than not out of proportion with the fault ... In addition ... warriors, along with their *toas*, were united and *tapu* in wartime. During wars they lived separately. They were fed by the other tribe members, and they were forbidden to have any intercourse. It was the same for fishermen during fishing periods, for planters at crop time, for the tattooer, his aides and his patient during the operation, which brought them together for several weeks.<sup>25</sup>

'Contact' with death — in the case of warriors — and with life — women giving birth or having their periods — makes a person *tapu* per se as long as the contact is actual. This temporary *tapu* is not a *kahui*; it does not result from a decision but from the automatic effect of the contact. More often than not, rites are necessary to neutralise the sacred effect of this contact.

## The large number of *tapu*

At the turn of the twentieth century, the missionary F.W. Christian recorded a list of *tapu*:

1. Formerly forbidden for women to eat together with men of bonito, squid, *popii*, and *koehi*.
2. Women might not go in a canoe.

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25 Rollin, 1928, pp. 79, 82. A doctor, who was resident on the Marquesas in the 1840s wrote, '*tapus* are the only police on these islands. Lacking *tapus*, society would be impossible, for there is no other form of law enforcement' (Lesson, P.A., *Pylade*, 4e voyage, t. 3 et *Documents divers, Marqueses*. unpublished documents. The Corderie de Rochefort archives).

3. Women might not climb on top of the platform of any sacred enclosure.
4. Red and dark blue clothes were prohibited.
5. Tobacco was not to be smoked inside the house.
6. Mats were not to be carried on the head or in the hands, but to be dragged along the ground.
7. Women might not eat bananas, fresh breadfruit, or coco-nuts.
8. Many sorts of fish were also *tapu* to women, also pigs of a brown colour, goats and fowls.
9. The *kuavena* fish was *tapu* to the fishermen, also the *peata*, a sort of shark.
10. Children might not carry one another pick-a-back.
11. Human hair when cut off was not to be thrown on the ground, for fear of being trodden on, or of any evil-minded person securing it for the purpose of uttering a curse over it.
12. Weeping was forbidden formerly.

The above list refers to the island of Nukuhiva; all *tapu* were abrogated when Te-moana married Vaekehu.

In South Marquesas:

13. There was a class of old men called '*taua*,' who were forbidden to do any kind of work, because of some sacred character attaching to them.
14. The *moko*, a species of shark, was *tapu* in Hekeani.
15. The *pukoko*, a small red fish, *tapu* in Uapou.
16. The *heimanu*, or sting-ray, *tapu* in Taipi Valley as the emblem of the god Upe-Ouoho.<sup>26</sup>

Numberless other *tapu* existed, including those regarding relations with the chiefs and priests, or *tauas*,<sup>27</sup> for example:

A Swedish officer, Adam Graaner, as he passed through Nuku Hiva in 1819 on the *Rebecca*, visited the bay, along with an American who lived there, and Graaner wrote: '... my interpreter Ross ... tells me

26 Christian, F.W., 1895, 'Notes on the Marquesans'. *Journal of the Polynesian Society* 4(3):187–202. Christian authored *Eastern Pacific Lands; Tahiti and the Marquesas Islands*, 1910, London: Robert Scott. Christian arrived in the Marquesas in 1894, with letters of recommendation from R.L. Stevenson and in his work he is indebted to Th. Lawson (see N. Thomas).

27 Graaner, J.A., 1983. 'Nukuhiva in 1819', in 'Journal of a Swedish traveller' (unpublished), B. Akerren in *Institut for Polynesian Studies*, vol. 7, no. 1, pp. 34–58. There were many *tapu* slapped on *tapa* and clothes. Issues of contact relate directly to clothing, so it is not surprising to read this in de Roquefeuil (1818): 'Some clothes for one of the sexes are taboo for the other ...'.

that they had priests and priestesses. One of them, who was highly respected, spent her days in Ross's home ... This priestess, who happened to be pregnant, and her husband were the valley's highest religious dignitaries, but their tasks were limited to tending diseases and wounds; ... They declared some objects, places or customs taboo.'

That is how all pink pigs were taboo and could not be served at the priests' table. A house could be declared taboo and thus uninhabitable although it was in good condition; the reason was that it had been desecrated by pig entrails as the pigs were slaughtered. All canoes were taboo for women, so much so that should a woman take it into her head to board a canoe, the canoe would become forever unusable for fishing or for war. ... The island's inhabitants used to manufacture their clothes themselves with the bark of a tree that resembled the mulberry tree. Now, for an unknown reason, the priests required that people discontinue the practice, and making fabric out of this tree was declared taboo. Since then, the fabric manufactured in Nuku Hiva has been made out of the breadfruit tree bark, and the other fabrics imported from Hiva Oa or from St Dominique ... The high-back chairs in public places are also taboo for the fair sex, which is not highly regarded on this island. Eating chicken is also taboo. As a matter of fact, the priests are lawmakers and physicians, and along with the chiefs, they wield a virtually unlimited power where superstition can influence the islanders' credulous minds.<sup>28</sup>

Regarding *tapu* decreed for the benefit of and by the priest, or *tau'a*, there is no shortage of testimonies. Chaulet cites some of those who became sacred (*hiji*), and consequently destined to die:

Those who 1) walk on their hair, on their shadow, on their mat, on their clothes, on their kitchen utensils, on the water meant for preparation of their food, on the place where they cook their food, on the wood meant to build their hut, etc. ... 2) All those who make no show of generosity toward them or take anything that is meant for them; 3) who pick fruits or coconuts from the trees that are reserved for them ...

In what he thereafter calls 'Human Victims' Statistics', Chaulet continues:

The *tau'as*, as members of the godhead, often claim human victims, thus: ... 4) Should they want to abrogate *tapus* that often go along with sacrifices, they still need a victim: *heaka mea puipui ia tau'a*,

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28 Chaulet, 1879–1900, p. 150.

*vel* (or) *heaka mea ha'a meie ia tau'a*. ... 5) Should they want to make a sacred place secular for some time, they need a human victim: *heaka mea papae koika*. 6) Should they want to make a sacred hut secular, they need a human victim: *heaka mea papae ha'e* ...

This power, enjoyed by the chiefs and priests, while it may seem to make sense, did sometimes drift into perversions. Davin, while passing through in 1884, could only find, after others before him:

Taboos were a powerful leverage in the hands of those who held power, the elder chiefs ... turned it into a tool for government, and the origin of property originated in taboos. When a ship dropped anchor in a cove, the chief held out his hand, uttered the two solemn syllables *ta-boo*, and this was enough to make him the only one to be eligible to exchange with strangers ... So the wise application of taboos may have one actual purpose; but what of the humiliating prohibitions preventing women from wearing white and red belts, or from lying on top of a dog?<sup>29</sup>

## How a *tapu* is lifted

On the Marquesas Islands, the lifting of a *tapu* often consists in removing the sacred character from that which is *tabu* by, in simple situations, a seawater bath followed by a freshwater bath. Symbolic, 'dangerous' or polluting acts, performed, for example, in the complex framework of the family system, can also work towards the lifting of a *tabu*: acknowledgement by the father by placing the child above his head — as he carries the child on his shoulders — or other attitudes assumed by the *pahupahus* — uncles or mother's brothers, paternal aunts, etc.

One of the most striking instances, reported by Chaullet, relates to the end of the one-year isolation period of a chief's child. The child grows up excluded from society because his birth makes him so *tapu* through the build-up of *mana* that he represents as a result of the series of generations he embodies:

On the next day, a sixth ceremony starts; although it is the last one, it is the strangest of all ... In order to put an end to the *tapu*, they take the

<sup>29</sup> Davin, 1886, pp. 237–38. Radiguet wrote: 'Other *tapus* have a sole purpose, namely personal advantage, or motives that are difficult to account for, such as the prohibition to lie on top of a dog, a hen or any *tapu* object ...' (1978, p. 111).

young chief to a secular place, and as the latrines are the most secular of all, this is precisely where the *makuvaipu* leads him. When the child reaches the place, the *makuvaipu* walks him around the latrines to the beat of drums, *papo* chants and *papaki akau*. This ceremony goes by the name of *oho hava*, or *oho kotikoti*. After the ceremony, the child is no longer holy, and he can show himself freely and go wherever mortals are allowed to go. The same ceremony for princesses is called *ta'ata'a ha'e*.<sup>30</sup>

Von den Steinen relates another instance that, incidentally, underscores one of the roles that tattooing plays. It follows the shutting-out period that is reinforced by the *tapu* surrounding any major activity:

Finally, we should keep in mind a remark by Wilson dating back to the eighteenth century. Body tattooing sessions ended with feasts accompanied by prayers and ceremonies — the *amoa*. The last *amoa* was designed to tattoo the head, if we don't take into account those meant for friendship and weddings ... Finally, a small mark on the inner side of the upper part of the arm of young boys and girls showed that the *tapu* affecting their relations with their parents was lifted, and they, at last, could have their meals with their parents.<sup>31</sup>

Desacralisation rites affect what is in the nature of a dangerous sacredness in itself, *amoa*.<sup>32</sup> They are not of the same nature as the lifting of a temporary prohibition, a *kahui*: what the chiefs' and *tau'a* have been able to do, the same will is enough to undo. This can be

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30 Chaulet, 1873. In Tahiti, the inauguration of a new *ari'i nui* goes through a similar final step: 'The chief, or the king, was seated on mats, near the god's image, and he was paid what they labeled the final tribute from the people, namely most shockingly dirty dances and performances, marked by the grossest obscenity, in which several stark naked men and women surrounded the king and strove to touch him with the various parts of their bodies, to the extent that he had trouble staying away from their urine and their excrements, with which they tried to cover him. This lasted until the priests resumed sounding their trumpets and beating their drums, and that was the signal for withdrawal and the end of the pageant. At that point, the king walked back to his abode, along with his retinue' (Moerenhout, J-A., 1835. *Voyages aux îles du Grand Océan*. vol. 2. Paris: Maisonneuve, p. 27).

It seems that the first locus for sacralisation, even of re-sacralisation, is the sea, the first of the *marae* (Henry, T., 2004. *Tahiti aux temps anciens*, Paris: Société des Océanistes). That is where the future *ari'i nui* or *tahua* would dip into the water after a transgression. This reactivated or renewed sacredness had to be partly neutralised through contact with low matter which, precisely, serves as an energy reducer and enables the *ari'i* or *ariki* and the sacred child to enter into relationship with persons of more lowly extraction without endangering their safety.

31 von den Steinen, K., 2005, 2008 (1925–28), vol. 1, p. 76; Wilson, J., 1799, *A Missionary Visit to the Southern Pacific Ocean, Performed in the Years 1796, 1797, 1798, in the Ship Duff, Commanded by Captain James Wilson*. London, p. 399.

32 See Rigo, B., 2004. *Altérité polynésienne ou les métamorphoses de l'espace-temps*. Paris: CNRS Editions, pp. 242–62.

implemented by reminding ourselves of the sacred connections with the ancestors and the invisible entities. This does not stem from the neutralisation techniques of objects or entities that carry in themselves a formidable power and hence are sacred or *tapu*.

Relationships between men and women, the fact that all take part in activities, exchanges and, more broadly, anything that involves contact, even a merely visual one, was taken into account. Relation to food, whether cooked or raw, the use of fire but also, of course, anything surrounding death, was strictly regulated by prohibitions. Rather than digress at length around the innumerable fields that *tapu* touched, or the aspects that they assumed, we provide below additional testimony about the nature and practice of *tapu*.

## *Tapu* affecting women and children

Regarding women, Stevenson sums up the situation thus: 'Many things were forbidden to men; to women we can say that few were permitted.'<sup>33</sup>

Women's lives laboured under a great number of restrictions, even though, Lesson remarked, 'Concerning *tapus*, I'll say a mother is something extremely sacred for her son: *mea tapu nui*, as Nu'uhivians say; the same goes for a sister;<sup>34</sup> a sister-in-law is also *tapu*, but less so ...'.

Thus, Radiguet observed:

Women are barred from entering canoes, unless it is an exceptional situation, which happens very seldom. During a meal, they make up a separate group where some foods never appear. They are prohibited

33 Stevenson, R.L., 1995 (1880). *Dans les Mers du Sud*. Paris: Petite bibliothèque Payot/voyageurs, p. 69.

34 Teupoo explains that 'a brother always regarded his sister as *tapu*. That is why a brother would never take the liberty to lecture his sister in public' (Tetahiotupa). This relation among family members is born out by Teupoo's recollection of the complexity of the notion of *tapu* as played out in the 1980s: 'I was pregnant and my husband was supposed to find a home. Finally, we had an offer from a family member to sleep in his house. When my mother heard that, she said that I was strictly forbidden to sleep in her bed. This family member happened to be one of my nieces. Even though she is older than I am, she is still my niece, and therefore, I, her aunt, was not allowed to sleep in her bed. As a result, my husband had to go out to get a bed, which he found at one of my cousin's homes. A cousin is regarded as a sister, so I could sleep in her bed. A niece is viewed as a child (of mine)' (Tetahiotupa).

from touching their husband's or their father's head, to walk over them when they are lying ... Women must respect places hunted by men, their weapons, their fishing tackle, their tools, but men are not required to show the same respect; so men do not refrain from walking into women's huts, from eating their food, and they have no qualms about taking women's things whenever they feel like it.

Stevenson and others provide a lengthy list of women's obligations: 'Women could not sit in the *paepae*; they could not go there up the stairs; they were not allowed to eat pork ...'.

Chaulet lists *tapu* by life domains, including:

*Tapu* relating to women: they were strictly forbidden to walk over the body of an individual, even his legs, to walk over men's clothes and mats,<sup>35</sup> to walk over household utensils, on places where food was cooked, on men's works, on wood brought by a man, on shavings, on the places where hair had been cut. They were forbidden to eat *popoi* beaten by a man,<sup>36</sup> even by his son, to hang their loincloth in the hut, to eat in places reserved for men ... etc.

As a doctor, in some ways Chaulet found that when a chief's son is born:

As the mother cannot, in this situation, feed the new chief, nor even stay in the same hut, the *makuvaipu* priest gets her a nurse, and, in this situation, he carries with him the terrible god *etua vahi* so this nurse could under no circumstance refuse to complete this constraining chore, a refusal for which she could be — along with her husband — killed by the terrible god ... so both submitted to the chore with no possibility to retort. This nurse was strictly forbidden to touch any

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35 Lesson P.A., *Marquises, Documents divers*, unpublished MS, Corderie de Rochefort, no. 8147, pp. 647–48. Teupoo still remembers the education she got from her mother: as a young girl she was never allowed to walk over a mat (except hers), she had to walk around it, and in this case she had to bring her skirt or dress against her legs, otherwise she had to fold the mat in order to clear the way, and then she returned the mat to its initial position.

36 Delmas noted about the *popoi*: 'The daughter should not eat the *popoi* beaten by her father; it is highly *tapu*. The father should not eat the *popoi* beaten by his daughter; that is strictly forbidden. The mother should not eat the *popoi* beaten by her daughter; that is strictly forbidden.'

secular object, to perform any work, to accept a puff of tobacco from anybody else's hand, to pomade her hair, to spread grease on her body, to get out of the *ha'e hakaiko* hut, to build a fire, etc.<sup>37</sup>

Regardless of whether they are boys or girls, children belong first and foremost to the women's space; as they are born of a mother's womb, they carry women's lifeblood. As they are descended from the *Po*, they are also closer to the ancestors, whose *mana* they perpetuate and, as such, they are sacred. That is why many *tapu* surround them as well, and more so when they are of prestigious high extraction.

The hut in which a young child is fed is made *tapu*. The child is not taken to another person's hut. Anything that he touches is thrown into a sacred place. He can touch nothing secular, such as a mat, a belt, a loincloth or a bed sheet ... He cannot walk under legs or under the mat, or under his parents' house. When the child is a chief's child, a *tau'a's* child, they keep his excrement for about ten days and usually they seek a human victim to throw this excrement onto a sacred place. Lacking human victims, they would make an offering to the gods. That was called *papae'i te tutae o te tama hou*. The droppings of a bird fed by a young child were also collected in a basket and thrown onto a sacred place. *Tapu* children could not wear anything on their shoulders; they were not even allowed to eat on their own; their mother had to feed them. The hut where a sacred child is fed is *tapu* and nothing inside it can be taken elsewhere ... Even breadfruit fruits and coconuts that are close to it cannot be eaten.

## Tapu food and fire

Anything to do with food preparation was strictly organised: categories and genders were separated, there were specific ways of eating food, specific places where food could be prepared, and what different individuals could eat was determined — for example, women could eat only the fish or shellfish that they caught on the seashore.

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37 Chaullet, 1873–1900; see also Pallmann's annotation in the 1873 manuscript (p. 65): 'When a high priestess is nubile (Pallman: that is, when she feels for the first time what all women feel every month) they build her a specific hut where she can spend a few days (Pallman: 5, 6 or 7 days, that is, the whole duration of her purgations.) During all that time, the drum is beaten ceaselessly in her honor. Nobody but her husband, if she is married, can enter her hut, unless this person wishes to become a leper or go blind, but as nobody has this wish, they simply put the food at her door ...'.

To provide an idea, Chaulet set up the following list:

Food. The mother does not eat *popoi* with her children unless they are very young. A mother never eats octopus with her son; as for bananas, each person eats his/her bunch, but never another person's bunch, even though the other person were a parent or a relative. A man does not eat coconuts with his wife. Scraps should not be thrown away on the path, or on the paving stones — whether inside or outside — of the hut because if a woman happens to walk over them, all those who ate this food would go blind or become lepers. The same goes for water, breadfruit fruit peels, the coals of the native lamp made from candle nut tree.<sup>38</sup>

Lesson wrote down the foods that were often tapu:

the murena eel, called *ku'e'e*, hen eggs (*mamae*), *tatu'e* (a big sea fish), *patiotio* (bird), the hen (*moa*), *pukiki* and *uaua* pigs (red and yellow), bananas (*meika*), coconuts, in front of *tuukas* ... commoners could not eat them, *honu* turtles, that is, sacred and reserved for the big chiefs. I'm told elsewhere that *Eato*, king of Upu (sic) Island, shut himself out in a special place to enjoy this food alone ... While fish is usually allowed to all, sometimes it should not be touched ... Women are the ones who sustain all hardships. Everything is prohibited, or off limits, for not only were they not allowed to eat some foods, they were also forbidden to touch the men's food, even their father's, brother's or male children's food. Likewise, big girls had to fix their own meals and eat them while separated from others. Even married women were not exempted.

I was saying that there are many *tapus* imposed by the high priest. The *tapu ahui*, *tapu tuhia*. The *tapu ta te pua i te ahui* is imposed on pigs when there are no more of them. They wait for more or less a long predetermined period until the pigs' numbers increase. In order to break this *tapu*, a *koika* (feast) is needed. The high priest orders one, called *koika to te atua*. At that junction pigs are killed, and eating them and selling them are allowed. Even women can eat their meat. However, they are never all sold, and this happens only when they are all made *tuhia*. When the French arrived in Nuku Hiva, pigs were *tuhia* in Teii's tribe. The father of the Taua Veketu had made them so. This *tapu tuhia* is imposed under the following circumstances: The high priest is accused of theft, and he admits he stole pigs. In order to neutralise this charge and to wreak vengeance, he grabs a pig and raises him over his head, saying *ua hihī te puaka tuhia i te atua* ...! After these

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38 *Aleurites moluccana*, 'ama kukui, tree nuts in Hawai'i.

words everybody is allowed to sell pigs and eat pork, except women, though, and all pigs must go (it is worth noting in passing that I clearly understood what I was told about this. It is easy to understand how pigs have so easily vanished from islands where they had been before ...) To put an end to this execration, now a human sacrifice is needed, and when it is performed, not only can women eat pork, but it becomes possible to raise pigs again. On April 12, 1844, the Taioa gave us an example of this, and a few months earlier the Taiipii [sic] had provided another one like it. The *ahui ehi* is the *tapu* on coconuts. The sign signifying it is a piece of dry coconut at the end of a long pole planted on a visible spot and meant to remind the people that they should not eat coconuts ... That is what Tamapu did when he saw Otooata coconuts being sold ... Often the pole is wrapped up in *tapa* flying in the wind. Nothing is more common than these poles, which have been noticed by all travelers and mean nothing but: The fruit of such trees (*mei, ehi, etc.*) are *tapu* for the people. The difference is that one relates to one fruit and the other to another one. Europeans need to get closer to tell one from the other, but the natives do not need to see them up close. For that matter, they do know that the *tapu* has been imposed on such and such an object.<sup>39</sup>

Quite specifically, some products were devoted to the members of the *tapu* class, which often included chiefs and priests. An officer from the Dupetit-Thouars expedition, Fl. Lefils, noted, for example:

The taboo is imposed on anything that is reserved for the nourishment of higher-ups and priests; pork, poultry, turtles, bonito, sea breams are prohibited to commoners; they must eat only coconuts, fruit from the breadfruit tree and fish not under a taboo.<sup>40</sup>

It is worth noting that eating human flesh was strictly reserved for people whose *mana* allowed it; to this can be added the rules on cooked food, the relation to blood, the sacredness of bones (long bones and head bones). Von den Steinen says: 'Unlike men who are not tattooed and unlike women and children, all tattooed men had a major privilege, the right to eat human flesh which can be accounted for through the

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39 Lesson, P.A., *Marquises, Documents divers*, unpublished MS, Corderie de Rochefort, pp. 643 à 645; *tatue*: parrot fish, *patiotio*: Marquesan monarch (*Pomarea* sp. *Muscicapidae*; *koika* means a ritual; *mei*: breadfruit tree fruit; *ehi*: coconut tree).

40 Lefils, F., 1843. *Description des îles Marquises*. Paris: Prevot, pp. 27–28. Lefils goes on: 'the privileged classes' houses are also taboo, and nobody is allowed in, unless he is a priest or a high dignitary; a commoner who breaks this taboo would be chased to death.'

Marquesans' warrior temper and through religion.'<sup>41</sup> De Marans deals with this issue at length, according to the way it was viewed at the time in the West, and Testard de Marans remarks:

If the number of prisoners that the victors were able to catch was considerable enough, they were led to the public square and offered as sacrifices to the gods to thank them, and to the tribe's protector genii. The victims almost invariably refused to utter a word or a complaint as they waited stoically for death, which they preferred to a demeaning adoption by the victor tribe. It was honorable for the vanquished to be devoured by the victor; the outcome of combat decided the fate of the man who had to succumb, and thus every warrior counted on it while fighting ...

Father Mathias Gracia, who lived on the islands between 1839 and 1842, and had a curious and intelligent view of Marquesan society, reported:

During a war, prisoners must also become victims, *heaka*; but if they are caught alive, which often happens through horrendous deceptions, they are, at least for a few days, treated with extraordinary consideration; they are toasted. If they are women, all prohibitions women were usually submitted to are lifted, and everything is ready for the sacrifice which, for that matter, these prisoners expect, but they are not moved by it, and when they least expect it, they are hit to death, most often from behind, with a lance, or by a lace put around their neck. Everything that I am telling here happened almost before our very eyes to the five women taken together by the Teiis during the war they fought against the Taïoas.<sup>42</sup>

The role and the use of fire has a special place, which is evident in testimonies on *tapu* relating to its manufacturing, or to its purifying function, and even to the fact of smoking, touching a pipe, and more broadly what relates to tobacco.<sup>43</sup>

41 von den Steinen, 2005 (1925–28), vol. 1, p. 91.

42 Gracia, M., 1843. *Lettres sur les îles Marquises, ou mémoire pour servir à l'étude religieuse, morale, politique et statistique des îles Marquises*. Paris: Gaume frères, pp. 66–69.

43 Regarding tobacco, Delmas noted: 'A woman does not smoke tobacco which has been hanging round a man's neck, but the husband smokes the tobacco which has been hanging around the wife. The sister and her maternal uncle smoke it too. It is not forbidden. Women never smoke tobacco which has been hanging round a man's neck. There are no exceptions. Tobacco which touched the hands of a chief's son is not smoked. A female chief, however, or a chief's sister, can smoke it. Smoking is not allowed above a garment or a decoration (*hei*) on a garment ...'.

All Marquesans make *tapu* the fire that they build for themselves, that is, they do not give any to others, unless they want to go blind or become lepers, or wish to be killed by the gods ... No matter how well a husband and wife get along together, the woman will never get the least spark from the fire that he has built for himself. The wife, by contrast, has no reason, and in addition, it would not be appropriate for her, to refuse to give him any. It is forbidden to women not only to use the wood that men have brought but also the wood they cut (in the South-East group).<sup>44</sup>

Lesson remarked:

As we understand it, thanks to *tapu*, the priests on these islands, especially the high priest, know how to ... make their will appear to be the Gods' will. As a result, it is only natural that the major ceremony should be the one that takes place on the death of a high priest. Then, *tapu* is imposed on the fire ... The *tapu* on the fire is the thing we notice, as it proves that all prohibitions were made up by men, be they noblemen or not, only with the purpose of isolating them, making them distinct, and more particularly, from women. Thus, based on their beliefs, the men's fire is the nobler. It should not be confused with fire designed for cooking women's meals; at least, this used to be their belief.<sup>45</sup>

## *Tapu* spaces and sacred plants

A fundamental portion of *tapu* rules was devoted to the setting where the islanders lived. Caillet emphasises how trips by individuals were determined by the places they had to avoid, either because the places were dangerous or because they were prohibited. As a result, people often had 'to take roundabout routes, which made the trip much longer in the mountains'. Lesson accurately noticed how islanders knew, thanks to their education and experience, how to naturally feel

44 Chaulet, 1879, p. 194. Chaulet also noted with regard to the birth rites of a chief's son: 'It is strictly forbidden to this nurse to touch anything secular, to work in any way, to accept a puff of smoke from anybody else, to pomade her hair, to oil her body, to leave the *ha'e hakaiko* hut (deep in the valley,) to build a fire, etc.' (1873–1900). We have also these remarks by Testard de Marans: 'Tradition, represented by *tabu*, forbids natives to switch names with animals, to spit in the middle of a hut, to drop coconut water while drinking and to drop *popoi* while eating, to smoke a chief's pipe, to kill certain birds, to eat certain fishes, etc.' (2004, pp. 170–71).

45 Lesson, P.A., *Marquises, Documents divers*, unpublished MS, Corderie de Rochefort, no. 8147, p. 649.

and recognise *tapu* signs. Handy indicates: ‘The limits of sacred lands were well known among the tribe and marked, during ceremonies, by poles with *tapu* banners’.<sup>46</sup> Likewise, they knew, for example, that:

All fruits near the hut where a corpse lies are prohibited to mortals, and for nobody to risk breaking this *tapu* unknowingly, they surround the place with stones walls, at least often so, and if there are only breadfruit trees, they surround the bark of those that are closest to the place where the body lies.<sup>47</sup>

Plants and trees were essential through their number and the amount they yielded: their substance, their fruits, even their shadow. The shadow was *tapu* on sacred places where it was forbidden to cut them, namely those belonging to each household or the community, but also deep in the valley, on the *me’ae* and in the *vao*, the space where the vitality or fertility of the island regenerates. Vitality or fertility determined the essence of places in the same way as the fixing fluid of fragrances in a perfume blend.

From banyan trees, which seem to link the sky and the earth thanks to their aerial roots,<sup>48</sup> to the breadfruit tree, which is so essential, prohibitions — *tapu* and *kahui* — relating to them were numberless.

W.P. Crook, a young Protestant missionary from the London Missionary Society, relates anecdotes regarding the breadfruit tree (*mei*) that occurred in Tahuata in the late eighteenth century and involved people related to chief Honu, from Vaitahu, whom Captain Cook met in 1774.<sup>49</sup> Oral tradition relates these incidents, which

46 Handy, E.S.C., 1971b (1923). *The Native Culture in the Marquesas*. Bulletin no. 9. Honolulu: Bernice P. Bishop Museum and New York: Kraus Reprint Co., p. 118.

47 Chaulet, 1879, p. 180.

48 The banyan tree is viewed as linking the earth to the sky. At the same time it represented the world and, more precisely, three worlds: the earth, the subterranean world (the *Po*), and the higher world. One account of this tree suggests that: ‘Man is born of this tree; this tree protects him from the harmful effects of the outside world, just as a mother protects the child who is in her womb. When the baby is born, the tree continues to protect him, by offering him its bark in the form of *tapu*. And when the time comes to leave the earth world, man will come back home to his abode. That is why human skulls can be seen in banyan tree roots. For us Marquesans, the banyan tree is a human being, it walks, it moves like a human being. Look at its aerial roots; we have the feeling it’s moving!’ (Tetahiotupa). Thus, *tapu*’s sacred character, called *hiapo*, which can be obtained from this plant, can be largely accounted for by the assimilation of this tree to a human being through the image of an axis linking the three worlds. For that matter, this is the reason why we can often find it close to the *me’ae*. The word *hiapo* deserves special attention. Literally it means ‘come out, come from the *po*’, a word which can be found in the Tahitian word *matahiapo*, which means eldest. For that matter, *hiapo* was reserved for the chiefs’ class (*haka’iki*).

49 Crook, 1800, p. 158.

conclude with the death of one of the protagonists, departures for faraway places or fierce fighting. The ancestor who founded a clan in Rotorua, on Maori land (Aotearoa New Zealand), left his native land with his people because of one of those misdemeanours.<sup>50</sup> A mother and her daughter had the same tragic end after they were suspected of stealing *mei* on the lands of Timotete's brother, Honu's nephew. Timotete was taken to England by members of the London Missionary Society.

The *Hibiscus tiliaceus* (called *hau* in the northern part of the archipelago, *fau* in the south) had multiple uses:<sup>51</sup> the bark was used during the offering of human victims, and the straightest, thinner branches were stripped. Their whiteness was reminiscent of the sacred character of a place. The *Pisonia grandis* (*pukatea*), whose bark and wood are very bright; the *mi'o* (*Thespesia populnea*), whose wood is, by contrast, red, like the *pua* (*Fagraea berteriana* var. *marquesensis*), whose white flowers are very fragrant; the *tou* (*Cordia subcordata*), whose flowers are orange-coloured; the ironwood casuarina (*toa*); and the banyan tree (*Ficus prolixa* var. *subcordata*, *ao'a*) could all be used as *tapu* signs, be *tapu* or *kahui* themselves. Chaulet, regarding the arrangements relating to the coming of a chief's newborn, reported:

In order that no lay person should soil this place by his presence, they fence in the tank — the child's bath near the *ha'e hakaiko* — with stripped hibiscus and they decorate the whole with a great number of banners, tree branches and plants which are viewed as the strangest in the land.<sup>52</sup>

Another example from Chaulet relates that 'the trees against which they leaned the *me'ae's* drums are *tapu*, and so are those which stand near the dead's tombs'.<sup>53</sup>

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50 This is Tamatekapua. Along with his brother, Whakaturia, he stole breadfruit tree fruits from a chief's enclosure. As they were caught, they had to fight Toi and Uenuku. Whakaturia and his father, Houmaitawhiti, died but Tamatekapua fled in a canoe with his family members. This is how the Arawas settled in the Rotorua area. On the Marquesas Islands it is possible to find, in the Pepei'u and Pepehau narrative, for example, facts that are reminiscent of those from which such an adventure originated, and this is not an isolated case.

51 Denning (1980, p. 195) relates the following scene: "The girls were playing *pehi hua*, a ball game; the ball is made of hibiscus leaves which were *tapu* for the girls, for the leaves were used during drills for memorising their ancestries. When the Enatas whispered that those children and their actions would bring famine, the girls just answered by chanting with renewed ardor: "There is only one God, and his name is Jehovah".

52 Chaulet, 1873–1900.

53 Chaulet, 1899, p. 73.

In this landscape there were buildings of all varieties; some were *tapu* to various degrees according to the sex and social class of the person, while others were clearly *paepae tapu* (prohibited) to all non-hallowed persons. That is the case for funeral sites. The biggest of these more or less *tapu* places were the communal sites, where the denizens of the valleys and their guests met year round. Roundabout, or in a section of the places, there was a more specifically *tapu* ensemble. Those places where feasts took place were called *taha koika*, *taha koina* or *tohua koika*. Stevenson wrote this about them around the 1880s:

At length, the huge trunk of a banyan tree emerged, standing on what seemed to be the ruins of an ancient fort, and our guide, halting and pointing to it, announced that we had reached the *paepae tapu*. *Paepae*<sup>54</sup> means a platform, like those that supported the native huts; and even those — *paepae hae* — can be called *tapu* in a lesser sense, when they are abandoned and become the abode of the spirits; but the public high place, like the one I tramped at the time, was done on a grand scale. The forest ground was paved as far as the eye could see in the thick copse. A three-tiered terrace lay on the hillside; in the front, a parapet that had suffered a landslide locked the main area, whose paving was pocked with wells and divided into compartments by small fences. There was no trace left of the superstructure, and the layout of the amphitheater was hard to grasp. I visited another, smaller one, in Hiva Oa, but it was in better shape, and it was easier to follow the rows of terraces and to make out isolated honor seats reserved for eminent persons, and where, on the upper platform, a sole beam from the temple, or dead-person's house, was still there, with its richly-sculpted posts. Once, the high place had been well tended. No tree, except the sacred banyan, could encroach on its terraces, no dead leaf could rot on its paving. The stone groutings were smooth, and I was told that they were even lubricated. All around, in their ancillary

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54 *Paepae* refers to a place to live in, with a protected space. It also refers to a headgear called *pa'eku'a*. This feathered headgear made of *kuku* (*Thouarsistreron leucocephala*) was worn by the big chiefs. An arrangement of horizontal feathers lined this headgear, another one of red feathers made up the horizontal band in the middle. In this word we can find *ku'a*, which means red, the sacred colour. The same colour was used on the stones making up the front of the upper platform of the Marquesan hut, called *pa'ehava 'oto*. P. Ottino-Garanger provides a clear drawing of this paving and explains the relation between the *pa'ehava'oto* and man's head: 'With this new threshold, which is raised and sheltered by a plant cover, we get into a more intimate and sacred place. Inside, the front part is paved; it leads to the sleeping place, which is the part furthest back in the lodging and the best protected. Marquesans used to sleep with their heads toward the back, that is, the most backward part, the best-sheltered one, their feet toward the front, and thus toward the less sacred part. The final space, between their heads and the back section of the rooftop, was reserved for the gods' (2006. *Archéologie chez les Taïpi, Hatiheu, un projet partagé aux îles Marquises*. Papeete: Aux vent des îles/IRD éditions, pp. 70–71).

huts, the guards in charge of watching and cleaning lived. No other human foot could get close. Only the priest, when he was on a tour, came there to sleep, maybe to dream of his impious task; now, on the feast's day, the clan gathered in groups on the high place and each had his/her predetermined seat. There were seats for the chiefs, the tambourine men, the dancers, the women, and the priests.<sup>55</sup>

Lesson visited and described other sacred places, including the interior of one of those buildings where the *tau'as* kept their valuables and *tapu* objects:

Continuation of our visit to Haka'a'au, Uapu Island ... King Eato ... had a guide provided to us and permission to visit all sacred places ... On the way, he showed us, a few steps away ... the small case ... where the king retired alone to eat certain foods such as turtles, for example ... After this canvassing, we went to the sacred abode of the priests. I asked what the real name was, but got no answer. [It] was a *tapu* house, even *arch tapu* [sic]; that much was certain, and what was inside proved it. There was a mystery atmosphere all round it and we could see that commoners were not allowed to approach it knowingly. To access the interior it was also necessary to climb up the rungs of a ladder, as in the king's *paepae*, for like him, it was raised on a block of stones. We were surprised at the great number of ornaments and objects that it contained. The first ones that struck our eyes were the bracelets made of human hair, for the insteps (the ankle joint) and the wrists were wrapped in all ceremonies. Here and there we could see hanging on the walls of the house those big baskets made of flexible thin boughs designed for fitting the plumes made of rooster feathers, called *tavaha*, the plumes made of old men's beards, called *kumikumi*, those made with phaethons' tail feathers and other objects; these baskets are called *kete*, and they come in various colors ... a fairly wide variety of drums of various shapes ... were in this home. The generic name of these drums is *pahu*. On all sides, on a floor, or hanging, we could see victuals, *kava* root [*Piper methysticum*] vases to prepare this drink; they came in various shapes and colors, huge rolls of fabric probably meant for decoration during ceremonies, and finally a wealth of other objects such as priests' caps, fans, etc. What was remarkable there was a collection of godheads, set there apparently in a haphazard way and all life-size. Some, and actually most, were made of wood, others of stone. The stone one which drew our attention the most was the statue of the god Tiki. At least that was the name they gave me when

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55 Stevenson, 1995 (1880). Stevenson visited a 'cannibal Mecca' in Hatiheu, on the island of Nuku Hiva. He was escorted by Father Siméon Delmas and a young guide.

I asked. It was a little less high than the others and sculpted exactly like the Tahitian statues which the author of *Polynesian Researches* showed in his books. Several wooden statues still showed traces of the *popoi* which was put in their mouths. Two or three priests only were present in this abode and they looked rather stern, but one of them could not help but smile when I showed him the heap of *kava* roots that were there. He seemed to understand that I meant they did not fail to indulge themselves. Not far from there was the casket meant for the king's (Eato) uncle, dead one month earlier, and still not buried ... Afterward, we went to see (in another place on the island) ... a vestige of a raised *paepae* ... a *paepae* is a high structure made of cut stones or roughly cut big blocks, square-shaped, ordinarily covered with a rooftop under which certain ceremonies took place and where there were permanent beds, a big amount of victuals, *pahu*, statues, etc; This is what I said about them when describing Eato's. This is what I think travelers called *marai* on the Society Islands (and it should be spelled *marae* to be exact) but I think they mistakenly compared them to *paepae*, for the *marae* is just a place where the natives have pieces of consecrated coral devoted to the gods. From what I saw, the *paepae* on Uapu [note: Hakahau] might probably be a locale designed for religious ceremonies; yet, as I saw in Vaitahu piles of coral which looked like what elsewhere is called *marae*, it may be likely that the two words meant about the same thing.<sup>56</sup>

## Transgressions and punishments

Punishments for having broken a *tapu* were most often ruthless, as described by Chaulet:

The causes of droughts and famines are:

- When women take it into their heads to have reeds run [sic], for these games are allowed only to men.
- When women take it into their heads to walk on stilts or spin a top, for this recreation is allowed only to men.
- When men take it into their heads to draw pictures with a string, to toss up walnuts and catch them, for these games are fit only for women.
- When some people wear fragrances during a public *tapu*.

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<sup>56</sup> Lesson, P.A., *Pylade*, 4th voyage, unpublished MS, Corderie de Rochefort, no. 8137, vol. 3, Chapter 12, pp. 55, 60, 61, 62.

- When gods are blasphemed: *ia kupu 'i te mei ; e aha tatu'a tororo mei.*
- When people eat and drink what was sacred for the gods.
- When breadfruit trees fruit, coconuts are compared to secular or shameful things.
- When women climb up breadfruit trees.

On blindness:<sup>57</sup>

The causes of blindness are the same as those of leprosy, plus the following:

- When, to dress a wound, people use coconut oil which a woman has already used to rub her body.
- When a man rubs his body with coconut oil which a woman has used for the same purpose, and conversely for a woman.

On madness:

- When a child eats his mother's *popoi* or pork as well as the breadfruit tree fruit or coconuts she has reserved for herself.
- When one of his parents has blasphemed his belt or what was meant for him.<sup>58</sup>

Among all these circumstances where a child could break a *tapu*, there are, for example, those which surround the tattoo mentioned by Chaulet in various manuscripts:

Tattooing the lower limbs of a noble woman or a female commoner is not only a huge disgrace for the tattooer but also a huge crime because ... women are impure, and the gods must punish this act not only by making the tattooer blind or a leper, but also by slapping a big food shortage or a famine on the country; as a result, they refrain from that ... female commoners cannot be tattooed except in isolated places with thick brush, for if through bad luck the gods get to see this desecration, they would have to send a big food shortage or a big famine as punishment.

57 Another instance asserts that 'The chiefs' tattooing was performed on the public arena, in the shade of holy trees; tattooing commoners, *kikinos*, was performed in the *vahi tapu* out of sight of women. Women on no account whatsoever could approach this holy place, for their presence would immediately result in the tattooed man's loss of weight and his going blind' (Testard de Marans, 2004, Chapter 2).

58 Chaulet, 1873–1900, p. 172; 1899. Sometimes poison was used, including the fruit of the 'eva, which contains a violent poison, cerberine: 'Kanakaks use it to kill the person among them who allegedly broke or divulged a secret' (Jardin, E., 1858. *Essai de l'Histoire Naturelle de l'archipel Mendana ou des Marquises*. Mémoires de la Société Impériale des Sciences Naturelles et Mathématiques de Cherbourg, p. 26).

What is striking is that it is not only the person who broke the *tapu* who is punished, but also the 'other party'. Everybody, often the whole community, has to suffer.

The fact that punishment is meted out to all stems from the notion of the primacy of the individual. The individual is perceived as a knot in the relations between the different elements in a network: both the *mana* — which can inform the whole community — and the adverse effects of transgression circulate through the punishment.

Assuredly, this permanent continuum between the visible and invisible members of the network, between the *Ao* and the *Po*, between the less sacred and the most sacred, involves extreme conductivity of energy among subjects and objects.

## Conclusion

All testimonies by the early observers converge: Marquesan — and more broadly Polynesian — societies are structured on the basis of various *tapu*. Prior to canvassing these *tapu*, it is proper to remember that they are sacred.

This sacred character is the main thing to apprehend; we must understand its nature and peculiar features if we are to understand the logic at work in the past, and sometimes today in Polynesia. Invisible entities, ancestors or women's lifeblood, the nature of sacredness is always genealogical, and its peculiar feature is extreme conductivity. This accounts for the network structure of the communities and the obsession with contact: prohibition is necessarily the mark of a dangerous continuity. Dead people's space and women's space always adjoin men's space. The community represented by the chiefdom is that visible interval framed by these two poles.

The following distinctions must be made:

- The product of these two poles is *tapu* by nature: a funeral site or the hut for women giving birth, for example, but also a young child is still part of the female space, or the body of a *ariki/haka'iki* permeated with *mana* from the ancestors or guardianship entities.
- What has been in contact with these two poles is temporarily *tapu*, such as warriors who have killed enemies, embalming specialists,

or the servant of an *ariki nui/haka'iki nui*; just as in the case of nuclear irradiation, a more or less long period is needed for decontamination. This also explains why it is not safe to share the food meant for a woman or for an *ariki/haka'iki*.

- Anything that an *ariki/haka'iki* or a *tau'a* or any sacred authority has prohibited and which will remain prohibited for as long as the authority has decided. Examples provided by the various observers show that here prohibition is not controlled by the nature of the object but by strategies relating to political/sacred power. In this regard, every object is likely to be prohibited: a tree, a fruit, a sea bream, or a pink pig.

Only the last category is of the nature of *kahui*. The prohibition for women to stride over a dugout canoe belongs to the first two categories. Women's life power competes with men's *mana*. In this instance it is not a *kahui*.

It is also easy to understand that if there are rules that all must obey, there are also rules that can be made up — in this regard, the scope of initiative of the *ariki/haka'iki* and of their *tau'a* totally depends on their privilege to set *kahui*. While, as noted by the early European observers, the chief could base his action on public interest and, after the council's opinion, he could lay down a temporary prohibition on certain plants or animals that needed to be protected and looked after, it is also true that this privilege was 'a powerful lever in the hands of those who held power, the old chiefs, etc.'.

In some instances, this lever made it possible to strengthen societal domination by men over women, or to expand hierarchies and increase inequalities within the community to the utmost.

It is interesting to note Davin's remark: 'The origin of property is to be found in the taboo', which is illustrated by contemporary signs indicating private property. Still, we have to add in closing, the move from an exclusive right of use based upon a sacred filiation to a property right which is not dependent on use signals a recent history marked by evangelisation and market economy. The issue here, with the *tapu* sign at the entrance to a plot of land, is the problematic relation to the land. The *kahui*, most certainly, did not invent property but it has always been a useful tool for personal interests which adjusted to their respective eras.

Lastly, *tapu's* efficiency is predicated on the punishment for transgression. The punishment may be automatic as soon as there is contact with a material that is hazardous in itself: madness, leprosy or blindness, for example. This idea is so deeply rooted that every plague is construed as punishment for a fault. Disease or drought don't necessarily originate in a transgression and it is important to identify its author. This logic can be found in many cultures: the Lisbon earthquake was regarded as the result of the wrath of the Christian god. When a *kahui* is involved, the transgression is perceived first as a challenge to the power of the *ariki/haka'iki* or the *tau'a*. Punishment first falls within their competence; it reflects flouted authority and, in the final analysis, the *ariki/haka'iki* or the *tau'a* is seen only as the privileged tool. It is not that the transgression of a perennial *tapu* cannot be punished inasmuch as the whole community is in danger; rather, punitive watchfulness involves first and foremost temporary prohibitions. Yet, as sacredness is the foundation of *tapu*, regardless of its nature, it is always dangerous to transgress a prohibition. Thus, the *rahui* slapped in 2010 on a sea area in Rapa is efficient only inasmuch as it reflects God's wrath, Yahweh henceforth replacing the ancestors' powers.

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