

TONGAN KAVA: PERFORMANCE, ADAPTATION, AND IDENTITY IN DIASPORA

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Abstract

Faikava Tonga represents the most common and diverse Kava drinking gatherings among Tongans in the Kingdom, and in diaspora. Literature on Tongan Kava will be reviewed to establish some background and spectrum of use. Drawing from auto-ethnographic and ethnographic research based on a multi-cited research sample, an update of adaptations to common Kava practices will be made. Helu's (1993) explanations of Kava use after the day's work, for courtship, or religious purposes will be compared with current practices in this research sample. It is argued that faikava today maintains those diverse elements and purposes, but is more often consolidated into a single group or event where they can take place simultaneously. These adaptations are practical and creative ways for urban diasporic populations to make, and keep connections to their Indigenous identities, through transported fonua (land) in the form of Kava. Faikava is a site of cultural reinforcement in diaspora. Kava gatherings facilitate performances of identity, mediation between socio-political relations, and the perpetuation of cultural values.

Keywords: Kava, Tonga, Identity, Indigeneity, Performance, Diaspora

POSITIONALITY AND METHODS

As a descendant of Mayan peoples from Iximulew (Guatemala), born in the U.S.A., and raised in Salt Lake City, Utah, I crossed paths with other groups in diaspora, being spread out from our ancestral homelands, such as the Tongan community. Tongan interactions in the context of my neighbourhood growing up was mostly with recent migrants and the younger generations born and raised in the U.S.A. like myself. I was introduced to Kava in my teens, initially through common and regular gatherings referred to as faikava, where high ranking chiefs are generally absent. I was more fully introduced into the Utah Kava culture through my close relative Mario Cadenas, and the Kava crew he was part of with Rob, Havili, and Sione Reeve's. Through those relationships others have flourished and been introduced to me, and Kava has since become a part of my life. I am Daniel Hernandez, but I am publishing under the last names of my grandmothers here to honour them. I am married with four children, and interested in the topics of Indigeneity and identity in diaspora, of which I'll engage with in this paper. This is a brief introduction to who I am and my relationship to this topic, and the people who have shared it with me and continue to be a source of knowledge.

I have participated in faikava in Utah (U.S.A.) for over 13 years now, which is where I draw my auto-ethnography from. This includes reflecting on and revisiting personal documentation such as journal writings, pictures, and the stories behind them. In addition, the ethnography portion includes 21 focused participant-observations during formal research in Utah. Having resided in the North Island of Aotearoa (New Zealand) now for two years respectively, I am

also drawing from 30 formal observations in the span of my official research so far, and many more before and after. Additionally, while attending a Kava conference in Canberra, Australia in 2015 I participated in 4 Kava sessions there, and since 2012 have been in 16 such gatherings across the major island groups in the Kingdom of Tonga. Several of these sessions are repeat visits to faikava with certain hosts or at organized kalapu (kava club's), each of which have been unique in their purpose for gathering, composition of attendees, focus of conversation, and song selection, among other things.

The primary method of gathering ethnographic data has been talanoa in person, over food, or at faikava (Māhina, 2008b; Vaioleti, 2006; Fa'avae, Jones, & Manu'atu, 2016). Talanoa has been explained as a circular narrative style approach to dialogue, and as an appropriate research method with Pasifika people. Hūfanga (Dr. 'Okusitino Māhina, personal communication) has also indicated that talanoa is a critical discussion in the context of knowledge production such as a research setting, but not exclusive to academic research. Drawing from decolonial research ethics and methods, the question of why am I doing this research and for whom are centred in my approach (Smith, 2012). This is one of the reasons I have not italicised Tongan words, because they are not foreign words but the norm, the centre. Additionally, I use the term Moana, which Māhina (2010) has explained to be a more appropriate term for the ocean, which is the Indigenous word for many in the sea of islands that transcend the parameters that have been used to divide regions in Oceania (Hau'ofa, 1993). Including my positionality briefly is to indicate my point of relation and introduction to Kava from where many of my relationships and participants for this research have sprung from. Although the participants are friends, mentors, and the like, I always provided a me'a ofa (gift) of some kind to individuals or to groups as a whole for sharing time and knowledge with me that was specifically for this research. My relationships do not end with this paper or my eventual thesis, but are ongoing. This is rooted in a common view of upholding relationships in both Mayan and Tongan worldviews, and I am responsible for maintaining these relationships in a good way, not only throughout this research but beyond it.

KAVA TONGA

The origin of Kava is a supernatural one in Tonga, where it first grew miraculously in the tale of which I'll give a brief introduction to here. It is important to note that there are several versions of the origin story of Kava in Tonga and I will just focus on some common elements (Biersack, 1991). A high chief (exact person varies in each narrative) arrived at an island where a father Fevanga, seeing this arrival anxiously prepared an umu (earth oven), while Fefafa his wife went to harvest kape (giant taro) to feed the honoured guest upon arrival (Shumway and Smith, 1999). They found him resting under the shade of the plant hoped to be harvested, and being unable to approach him because of his status and rank, they put their daughter in the umu as a sacrifice to offer him. When the high chief heard of such devotion he refused the gift and instructed them to leave it as her grave. Another version says he took off before the umu could be uncovered, and it eventually became their daughter's grave, whose name was Kava'onau. Two plants eventually grew from her tomb, one being named after her, Kava, and the other was Tō (sugarcane). In the version where the high chief Lo'au was an attendant and heard of these miraculous new plants growing from the grave mound, he instructed her parents to take it to the Tu'i Tonga (paramount chief of Tonga) as an offering, one sweet, one bitter, a balanced gift (Biersack, 1991; Wolfgramm and Shumway, 2001). Among other values these narratives teach are the importance of sacrifice, balance, and sacred responsibilities of reciprocity both in the offering by the people, and in the chiefly

refusal to accept such a costly one (Biersack, 1991). Kava is the national drink of Tonga and remains a powerful icon of identity and cultural values in Tonga, and throughout the Moana (Aporosa, 2015; Shumway and Smith, 1999).

Kava Tonga manifests itself in various forms dependent on the type of event, purpose for gathering, rank of attendees, and frequency of getting together, being consumed in each of these settings predominantly, but not exclusively by men. The pounded Kava root today is infused with water before drinking and can be considered a soporific, although the effects depend on how much is infused with the water and the type of Kava used as well (Aporosa, 2014; Kaeppler, 2010). In the case of Tonga, the social hierarchy and political organization is reflected in Kava ritual performance of presenting, preparing, and drinking it (Biersack, 1991; Pratt, 1922). We distinguish the Kava ceremony or ritual in naming it, which is significant in addressing who is in attendance in order to appropriately reflect the Tongan social and political relationships it represents. For example, Taumafa Kava and 'Ilo Kava are what it is called when the Paramount Chief/King or Chief's/Nobles are receiving their titles, or to acknowledge their presence, generally speaking. The chiefly Kava rituals are performances that mediate the hierarchical power relations, which Helu (1999) referred to as "social theatre" (p.232). Biersack (1991) explained this as contractual agreements between rulers and people. There is certainly more to be said on this matter, but as it is not the focus of this paper, it will suffice to mention there are distinctions not being addressed at this time other than Kava rituals have various degrees of performance, which reflect a sense of order and mediation of social and political hierarchy.

Kava ceremonies reproduce cultural values and relationships while reflecting the origin story in each of the ranked settings and degree of protocol utilised. Perminow (1995) argues that there is only one Kava ceremony in Tonga and the formality level can be "dressed up or down to elaborate, and thus play a part in, the on-going constitution of a diversity of social relationships" (p.119). Each of the ceremonies are all connected and bleed into each other in purpose, format, and function, although they may be for a variety of events, and reflect different socio-political power relations. Fai Kava (faikava) then is in reference to tu'a/common(er) Kava. Although I agree with Perminow (1995) that Kava Tonga is one whole that is diverse in the types of occasions and purpose for gathering, when speaking or writing about it, the composition of who is present or how one is present is an important relational distinction to make, which is reflected in the name given to explain it. For this reason, it is also worth defining further and noting a range of purposes and practices possible when referring to faikava, which is the focus of this paper. Felman (1980) considers faikava to be informal rather than ceremonial and distinguishes it into 2 categories of either being a public kalapu kava (kava club) or a private setting in someone's home. However, when talking about going to faikava it could also be in reference to other types of occasions as well, such as at life events, including funerals and weddings, that won't be discussed in this paper. Futa Helu (1993) explained a few types faikava practices that are useful to get a deeper understanding of what I will be referring to. He explains that what is called tau fakalokua, is a Kava gathering at the end of a day's subsistence work in the farm or at sea. Faikava eva is courtship Kava where young men serenade and attempt to court a young woman who they have asked to be the Tou'a (Kava preparer/server). Kava fakasiasi is Kava gatherings centred around churches that allow or integrate Kava use in their congregations. The most recent group organization and arguably the most commonly known and frequently attended today is the kalapu (Kava club), which may generally be considered to be a more democratic setting, and often used for community based fundraising.

The form in which Kava is presented, prepared, and used is dependent on the factors explained thus far and has a diverse and broad spectrum. The functions however, remain constant, which include the facilitation of mediating conflict to resolution, or moving from restlessness to restfulness; this is supported through performance arts that create and reflect harmony in a Kava session such as speeches, songs, and stories (Māhina, 2008b; Māhina, 2011a). Perminow (1995) argues there is never really informal Kava sessions that are not “governed by rules of procedure and behaviour” (p.119). Perminow (1995) also states that Kava “always involves symbolic expressions that play a part in the *constitution or reconstitution of important social relationships*” (p.120). Futa Helu commented in the documentary film *Kava Kuo Heka!*, “Kava ceremony is the centrepiece of our ceremony and our rituals” (In Shumway and Smith, 1999). It is in this sense and focus that a range of elements in Tongan identity found in faikava will be explored. This will include the performance arts that take place within these Kava sessions, and how they support the function of binding people together in the Kingdom of Tonga as well as in diaspora.

KAVA ADAPTATIONS

Helu (1993) explained that tau fakalokua (Kava after work on a plantation or at sea) and faikava eva (courtship Kava) were nearly obsolete when he wrote his article on cultural change since European contact, and with it mentions the rise in prominence of the kalapu (club). For each of the diaspora groups in cities outside of Tonga and for those residing in Tonga’s urban centres, tau fakalokua remains, but increasingly in response to new forms of work, such as wage-based employment within more intensely neoliberal capitalist locales and nation-states. The purpose of unwinding, talking, and sharing the day’s work and learning from each other continues on today in the locations I have mentioned, but now reflect the new demands, settings, and types of labour. Tau fakalokua is housed in a faikava at someone’s home, similar to before, or in an organized group that meets together regularly (e.g., weekly) such as a kalapu (kava club). Kalapu’s in most settings I’ve attended take place in a separate area of a home, such as a garage.

Faikava eva on the other hand has transferred in location as to who is the host, and considering Helu’s (1992) observations of it being more and more rare, I would argue it has adapted, but remains present. The presence of a tou’a fefine (woman kava preparer/server) has generally been rare in the circles I’ve attended, but knowledge of this role is well known, and is one of the more distinct elements of Tongan Kava gatherings. When I’ve attended multi-ethnic group settings of faikava that may still be predominantly Tongan influenced, but composed demographically of people from across the Moana ancestrally, the Tongan practice and reasons for having female tou’a’s is at times contested through humour and story by non-Tongans. There are some Tongans who believe Kava can be an aphrodisiac whereas some of the non-Tongans who are also from the Moana have often contested that notion in multi-ethnic spaces, commenting that it is not the case, and if it is, it is only for Tongans, which is usually told through comedic means. Within the communities and specifically some religious denominations, the continued presence of a tou’a fefine at a kalapu is controversial, and some religious and community leaders have associated the practice with infidelity and marital discord. When Helu (1992) refers to faikava eva, it is single men who court the young woman, whereas in the kalapu, flirtation (e.g., courtship) can come from single and married men. There are some spouses who I’ve spoken to that have expressed their discontent with this and in some cases, such as one woman I spoke with in Tonga, ban their husband’s participation at a faikava if there is a tou’a fefine there (Fefine Tonga, personal

communication). One participant said that the controversy has emerged because “we have removed the tou’a from her home where she is host, and brought her to the kalapu, in the realm of men” (Tangata Tonga Eiki, personal communication). A tou’a fefine in her own home being courted, differs from being outside of it as a guest or fulfilling a service (in many cases payment or cash gifts are given), the new environment reflecting the changing gender and power relations. Although this adaptation is controversial, Kava courtship remains intact in altered ways and settings. Faikava in its adaptations over time has now consolidated various diverse practices and uses into the kalapu and other Kava drinking sessions.

Today, the practice of tau fakalokua can be combined with faikava eva in the same space and at the same time. A large group of men can have different participants attending for various reasons, some coming in after a day at work, and others maybe because they heard there would be a tou’a fefine there. In some cases, I observed that single men would sit closer to the tou’a and married men further away, unless there were two circles at the same event where one would consist of younger single men and the other of older married men. Generally, the flirtations would be exclusively among the younger and single participants. This is not always the case however, and having married men flirt with a tou’a is where more of the controversy seems to stem from. There is also a narrative that younger people and diaspora populations don’t talk to the tou’a respectfully (direct sexual language and lack of metaphorical speech considered inappropriate, etc.). The definitions of respect and accepted flirtations get quite complex however, where some would say no flirtation is appropriate if you are married, while others would say it is ok as long as it is in the form of heliaki (metaphor) and you do not act on it. On the few occasions that I have witnessed older men who are married carry out metaphorical flirtations with a tou’a, some of them have said to me that it is to show the youth the proper way to engage with a woman. They say this is because many speak too directly to the tou’a instead of using poetry, innuendo, and metaphor (heliaki). This was confirmed by some of the youth (single, under the age of 30), but on one occasion, one attendee added that sometimes you have an older person who is “for real trying to get at the tou’a” and it is not just for show, and that this is where the infamous stories that people tend to remember come from (Tangata Tonga, personal communication).

There are numerous groups in my sample who do not have any tou’a fefine at all, mainly due to these controversies. For groups who do have tou’a fefine, they do not always have one, for reasons such as the unavailability of someone who everyone in the group is not closely related to (includes family friends). It is important to remember as well that in the Tongan and Moana contexts I am speaking of, a tou’a is often dressed in a long skirt and often with long sleeves as well, especially in Tonga. Tou’a fefine generally operate in a Tongan Christian sense of modesty, which is to say Tongan values that are influenced by Western puritan notions of modesty (to cover most of the body with clothing). I have generally also observed them to also be wearing a kiekie (Tongan waist belt regalia for women that is tied around the waist). One of the performances of Tongan values and identity that is revealed in these interactions is that direct speech of intent or interest towards a tou’a fefine is considered rude and disrespectful in many cases, whereas poetic and metaphorical speech is favoured, praised, and developed.

Kava fakasiasi (church/Sunday Kava) is still going strong today among church’s that practice it. Generally speaking, the various Methodist denominations and Catholics may integrate Kava into their leadership meetings and welcome of visitors. They may also allow the congregation to use church facilities to gather once or twice a week to faikava. In some of these congregation’s they may also sponsor a specifically youth Kava group as well that would meet on church premises. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

(Mormons/LDS) doesn't have an official ban on Kava although it can be controversial and there is a variety of perspectives for, against, and in between by leaders and members. I won't delve into the details of fakasiasi at this time other than some of its integration into the kalapu and other non-church based faikava practice. One of the consistent practices across countries, clubs, and groups regardless of religious affiliation, belief, or participation level in any organized Christian religion is Sunday/Sabbath observance. I have observed as a general rule that Saturday midnight to Sunday midnight is a time to show reverence for the Sabbath. The type of conversation and music during a faikava in that time frame differs from outside of it. Hiva Kakala, which has been explained to me as either songs of sweet fragrance or love songs, become songs about Jesus sung in the same musical style, or as rearrangements of hymns from one's own denomination, or a mix of hymns from various sects (Kaeppler, 1994; Moyle, 1987). The conversations often shift to congregational community issues, theology, or religious doctrine. The varying degrees to which this is practiced depends on the group, but in my observations, were often more pronounced when elders or religious and community leaders are present. The symbolisms around Kava have taken on Christian meanings and/or are now used in various Christian contexts as mentioned above. Vaka'uta (1991) explains that the combination of Kava and sugarcane taken like Christ's cross together are like the two elements of the Eucharist. This draws from the parallels between Christianity and Kava'onau being tied to the fruits of sacrifice. In one of the faikava's I attended in Utah this topic came up; the attendants and hosts were Fijian or Tongan, and all of them were Mormon. They shared that if Jesus were to come to their home, the best way they could honour him would be to present Kava to him. Elements of Kava fakasiasi are generally part of the faikava and kalapu kava that I have witnessed.

Tongan faikava today from the sample's in this research indicate that the previous practices of tau fakalokua, fakasiasi, and eva that Futa Helu outlined in 1993 still remain in their respective functions, but increasingly are merged into new forms. They have been combined as an adapted practice of faikava in the more densely populated centres in the Kingdom of Tonga and in urban areas throughout the diaspora such as at the kalapu (Kava club's). Whether the purpose is to unwind and decompress at the end of the day, or the courtship of a tou'a fefine, whether in actuality by youth, or in a performance of cultural memory by an elder, both purposes can take place simultaneously in the same night or within the same group. Religious elements expressed through the spectrum of Christianity that contains Tongan spirituality, such as worship through song and Kava consumption, is also continuing to take place as well. My argument here is that the Kava bowl and process of gathering to drink, dialogue, and sing was and is a vessel of cultural knowledge that in many cases today has compressed various elements of previous practices into one. Therefore, I suggest that the Kava bowl is a vaka (canoe) of Tongan and Moana identity that journeys back and forth through time and space between tupu'anga (ancestors), Tonga, and where Tongans reside.

BINDING AND IDENTITY

Kava is about bringing people together, and it is also about learning, and maintaining a Tongan and Moana identity. I've noted several comments to support this concept during my ethnographic participant-observation, and talanoa in faikava that took place in homes and kalapu's (usually in someone's garage or basement). Robert Reeves who identifies himself as hafkas (Half Caste - Tongan/European) stated that "Kava brings people together" and explained that this is what Kava is about for him, referring to the gathering of his family and close friends in the circles he is part of (Robert Reeves, personal communication; Utah,

U.S.A.). Another young Tongan (in his 20s) stated that “It’s just part of who we are, you can’t separate Tongans from Kava” (Tangata Tonga, personal communication; Aotearoa). Kis. B, a Tongan Hip-Hop artist and producer explained that it doesn’t matter what your background is, there’s lots of religions and ethnicities that can be represented in one Kava circle, indicating that a diverse set of people can be unified through Kava (personal communication; Utah, U.S.A.). The last comment I will share to make this point emerged collectively in a co-constructed idea through talanoa in one gathering, but thematically it also appeared in different words and expressions in each research site that “Kava is like the ocean, it’s what connects us” (Tangata Moana, personal communication; Utah, U.S.A.).

Place is a significant factor in many Indigenous identities, in fact that is how I am defining Indigenous here, as the languages and cultures that emerged out of a particular place and the people that belong to it. As Indigenous peoples, we face a dilemma and conflict when removed from or separated from places (considering both time and space) where our identities are tied to, through genealogy, knowledge, and being. This phenomenon is confronted by more and more people finding themselves in diasporic contexts whether by overt displacement or influenced by covert forces of migration such as globalizing political economy. I am conceptualizing diasporic context as a state of separation/scattering from, and/or being spread out from the subsequent sites of cultural reinforcement to where Indigenous identities were created, and the process of bridging or narrowing that distance. Cattermole (2009) speaking on the Kava singing in Fiji explained that “The people are the *lewe ni vanua* (the flesh / members of the land); the human manifestation of the physical environment. The land belongs to the people, and the people belong to the land” (p.157). She goes on to explain how particular styles of Kava singing in Fiji is part of constructing a sense of who one is and where they belong, reinforcing kinship ties and homeland with songs that etch in the meaning and value of place. This concept of connection/connecting to the vanua (land, people, tradition, etc.) is fonua in Tongan. Fehoko (2014) titled his master’s thesis with the saying pukepuke fonua, which he explained is an expression often shared in reference to gathering around a Kava bowl to faikava. This saying means to hold on tightly to the fonua, the land, its people, and their traditions.

While drinking Kava with Victor Narsimulu, a Rotuman who now resides and studies in Utah, he mentioned as he went to stir the Kava before we all took another cup, that it was the ocean. As he dipped in the ipu/bilo (Tongan-Sāmoan/iTaukei word for coconut shell cup used to drink Kava), the kava that had settled at the bottom of the wooden kumete/tano’a (Tongan word and more formal word for Kava bowl), it looked as the sand does when it is churning in the ocean current near the shore, being stirred into a homogenous consistency before being served out to drink. Kava is transportable fonua/vanua, and Moana peoples in diaspora are able to maintain Indigenous connections to their identities of the land and to the lands themselves whether they were born in ancestral places or not as they bring their land with them and continue to ingest it, despite their distance from place (Aporosa, 2014; Aporosa, 2015).

Eric B. Shumway, who carries the title faivaola, explained in the documentary film he directed about Kava that similar to faikava, when a Tongan person puts on their ta’ovala (waist mat) and ties it onto them, it is also called pukepuke fonua (to hold on tightly to the land/fonua) (Shumway and Smith, 1999). It is a metonymical and metaphorical binding of place and land to oneself, which is expressed through different aspects of Tongan identity. These aspects of Tongan identity are exhibited through wearing Indigenous regalia such as the ta’ovala that is tied on with the kafa (coconut sennit rope) and/or through participation in Kava sessions. There has been scrutiny however within the communities about diasporic

practices of faikava and from some religious oversights as well. There is a criticism by some that new materials, or regular kava use often termed as recreational are un-traditional, negative, and perceived to dominate Kava practices. For many in diaspora I have observed, although the material of the vessels used to prepare, serve, and drink Kava may change from a coconut shell to a plastic bowl or cup, the purposes of binding people together through the land has been consistent. In the various groups, I have visited or participate with, when there is a community member in need, attendees donate whatever funds they have or whatever support they can to lift up that person. In every setting I was in, some form of sharing or gifting took place, whether it was shared chasers to eat during the faikava such as fruit or lollies that represents the Tō (sugarcane) in the origin story of Kava, or money pooled together to help out someone in the group. There is the direct connection to land by ingesting Kava, and also extensions of that connection to the land's people, through the behaviours reproduced in faikava of establishing and maintaining relationships, through gifting and sharing. This is a reflection of a paramount aspect of Tongan culture and identity, expressed in the value of Tauhi Vā, an art of social spatial relationality, which means to nurture the space between, that is to say one's relations, which is a fundamental part of faikava (Ka'ili, 2005).

PERFORMANCE AND TONGAN IDENTITY

Māhina (2008a; 2011a; 2011b) explains that Kava facilitates various forms of artistic performance. Included in these art forms are comedy, music, and story. These spaces are sites where one can refine these particular arts and skills and in turn develop a Tongan and Moana identity through that process. Additionally, this development of identity I argue prepares many participants to participate in life events and Tongan ceremonies. For example, participants in both Aotearoa and Utah expressed experiences where they were able to participate in the Āpo (Tongan wake/evening before funeral) singing, because of songs they learned and practiced at faikava. This was especially meaningful for some of the Tongans who said they are learning or struggle with the language. Kava was one of the crucial sites for them where they found cultural reinforcement to home life and values in contrast to the dominant society in each of the diasporic contexts of the settler colonial nations of Australia, New Zealand, and the U.S.A.

Among Kaeppler's (1985; 2010) guidelines to understanding performance ritual is the question of what the intention is of the performance? Considering Māhina's (2011b) explanation that these are called faiva in Tongan, meaning performance arts. I will briefly explore one of the intentions and functions of the performance of comedy that is refined and practiced in faikava settings. Fakaoli, the art of Tongan comedy in my observation is quick, witty, and poetic, and often uses heliaki (metaphor) (Māhina, 2008a). Tongan identity includes living its values of respect and solidarity (Taumoefolau, 2013). Comedy is a means of uplifting a group and/or mediating conflict or disputes in the process of finding resolution towards creating harmony (Māhina, 2008b; Māhina, 2011a). I suggest that it would be more disrespectful in most cases not to honour one's relationships, and since speaking directly can be considered quite rude, especially to superior relations (familial or political) publically, comedy (often utilising heliaki as a medium), serves as an anaesthetic for direct speech, a parallel of, or knowledge from, the physical effects of Kava on the body as a relaxant. Biersack (1991) also explains that the effects of Kava are mirrored during ritual performance such as Tonga being immobilized during a Taumafa Kava (royal Kava ceremony) with streets shut down and behaviours and actions restricted in the ceremony and its surrounding

proximity. The conclusion I make from the literature aforementioned and the ethnographic data in this research analysed thus far, is that comedy is often a tool, and a respectful strategy to bring up something difficult to someone of higher rank, to mediate conflict, or soften a criticism or controversial position during a faikava.

For many young people in diaspora the faikava is where they can listen to their elders, but in many cases, also where they are able to speak more openly to them than outside of the Kava space. The sacred restrictions and requirements for Tongans and many Moana people is known as Tapu (Mead, 2003; Taumoeofolau, 2013; Shore, 1989). Expressing Individuality openly and holistically can be difficult due to tapu of being in the presence of outranking elders, siblings, or community members. Kava is Mana, an effective power, derived from its supernatural origins from God(s) and is potent, and therefore has the ability to render Tapu relations into a state of Noa (neutralized, balanced, zero). This allows a lower ranking person (e.g., because of age) the ability to speak more openly to someone of higher rank, which outside of the faikava space may be much more limiting where the tapu (sacred/restricted/set-apart) relation is not neutralized (Aporosa, 2015; Kaeppler, 1994; Kaeppler, 2010; Māhina, 2008b; Shore 1989). In urban diasporic Moana vernacular, an adopted expression Moana people may use is that of “keepin’ it real”, although in their case it is a merged meaning between noa spaces where one performs openly and the expression derived from the hip hop cultural value meaning that you are honest with yourself and are representing your holistic identity (Zemke-White, 2004). The neutralized Tapu relations in the Noa state found in the Kava space is where many feel they can ‘be real’, and they are more open because relationships have become balanced with Kava along with the performances such as comedy that it facilitates.

CONCLUSION

There is certainly much more to be said about Kava Tonga, but here I’ve demonstrated how it has adapted and perpetuated cultural values and elements of identity in Tonga and abroad. From its miraculous origins from a young woman’s grave, balancing elements emerged in the form of Kava and Tō. This balance is literally maintained through the consumption of Kava and having a sweet chaser after drinking it. This knowledge extends into social interactions as well, where comedy, metaphor, and talanoa are social anaesthetics. Similar to Kava’s physical soporific effects, dialogue and laughter mediate conflict or socio-political hierarchy into balanced relationships, being a sweeter element like the sugarcane that balances out Kava. Some of the various forms of faikava that were outlined by Helu (1993) persist today although in adapted forms and with new challenges, but generally still maintain the functions of decompressing from a day’s labour, maintaining spiritual and religious ties, and for courtship. Kava facilitates the connection and development of Indigeneity in urban and diasporic settings as well as in the Kingdom of Tonga through the re-enactments of Kava’s origins through performance of Tongan values and identity while ingesting it.

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PERSONAL COMMUNICATIONS (TALANOA AND INTERVIEWS)

Dr. ‘Okusitino Māhina (Hūfanga): Tongan Anthropologist

Victor Narsimulu (Rotuman): UVU cultural envoy director, University of Utah PhD Student

Robert Reeves (Tongan/Pālangi): Youth Corrections, Ogden Kava Boys Kalapu

Kis. B (Tongan): Hip Hop artist and producer, H.O.G. Farm Kalapu

Tangata Tonga Eiki (Anonymous Tongan elder over the age of 50)

Tangata Tonga (Anonymous Tongan man under the age of 50)

Fefine Tonga (Anonymous Tongan woman under the age of 50)

Tangata Moana (Anonymous Pacific Islander(s))

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