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THE PAST BEFORE US: A BRIEF HISTORY OF TONGAN KAVA

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ABSTRACT: This article examines deep and contemporary history through analysis of the Tongan kava origin story, a kava chant, the rise of the kalapu 'kava club' in the twentieth century and the growing expansion of contemporary kava. It is argued that a key function of past and present kava practices is a ritual liminality of noa 'neutralisation of protective restrictions' that results from mediating mana 'potency, honour' and tapu 'protective restrictions, set apart'. This is supported through ethnohistorical literature, song lyrics and ethnographic data. While the expressions, purpose, material and uses of kava evolve and change throughout time and space, from the titular ceremonies to the social rituals, they are connected through contextually specific mediations that establish noa. The kava origin story indicates a performance of mediations between ancient power relations, while the kava chant describes material culture alongside the establishment of the ritualised chiefly kava ceremony. Kalapu and the expanding contemporary kava practices today maintain connections to past practices while adapting to current circumstances such as global Tongan mobility and cultural diversity.

Keywords: Tonga, kava (*Piper methysticum*), indigeneity, metaphysics, ritual liminality, kalapu 'kava club', Polynesia

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Long ago on the island of ʻEueiki a young woman miraculously transformed into kava (*Piper methysticum*) and *tō* 'sugarcane' (*Saccharum officinarum*). This marks an origin of kava's appearance in what is currently known as the Kingdom of Tonga. However, the origin is a socially constructed one, according to Huʻakau (2018), who argues it was an invention of the foreign chief Loʻau representing the foundation of a newly created social order based on the kava ceremonies he established. Queen Sālote Tupou III shared that Loʻau is known as a *tufunga fonua*, a title which refers to those who are "founders of customs and the regulators of social life" (Bott 1982: 92).

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Recognising that kava is an integral and complex aspect of Tongan culture that we cannot cover exhaustively in this article, we argue that a social function of kava rituals is to enter a state of liminality that we frame as being *noa* ‘a state of neutralised and suspended protective restrictions’. We argue that the function of kava in creating noa continues in various forms within the diverse spectrum of Tongan kava practices throughout time. We will support this argument with ethnohistorical literature and ethnographic research in Aotearoa, Australia, Utah (USA) and Tonga (2015–2019) as well as auto-ethnographic data from the authors’ lived experiences. We will first introduce Tongan ideas and concepts of time–space construction and noa. We will then work through some of the origin story of kava and an ancient kava chant in Tonga. We will analyse some of the historical and cultural implications in this story and song. We will then explore the contemporary adaptations of kava ceremonies, beginning with the rise of the *kalapu* ‘kava club’ phenomenon in the mid-twentieth century. We conclude by exploring some contemporary variations in kava use, including a war story that reflects the *mana* ‘authority, honour, potency’ associated with this ancestral tradition. In each era of exploration, we identify the mana of kava to neutralise *tapu* ‘set-apart restrictions, danger, sacredness’, which potentially yields noa within each temporal-spatial context of Tongan kava.

TĀ-VĀ AND NOA

Māhina (2010) and Ka‘ili (2017b) explain that *tā-vā* is a lens through which to view intersections of contextual arrangements of time–space, expressed in Tongan concepts of *tā* ‘beat, rhythm’ and *vā* ‘space, point between’. Certainly time–space intersections are a process that human actors navigate generally across cultures. However, this Tongan perspective is one that is explicitly mindful of temporality, and intentionally arranges time and space with the past in front (Hernandez 2019). Māhina (2010) expresses this idea by stating that “people walk forward into the past and walk backward into the future” where time is mediated in a paradoxical present (p. 170). The present essay is titled “The Past Before Us” to assert our contemporary present position that mindfully faces forward into the past. Ka‘ili (2017a) explains tā-vā within the example of one of Tonga’s paramount cultural values, *tauhi vā*, which he defines as a performance art of nurturing socio-spatial relationships. In social relations, for example, when connective space is in a common rhythm it is linguistically expressed as *vālelei* ‘positive spatial relations—harmony or balance’, whereas when in-between space is not effectively mediated it is *vākovi* ‘negative spatial relations—disharmony or imbalance’ (Ka‘ili 2005, 2017a; Thaman 2008). This cultural value is mediated differently across and between Tongan social ranks (Bott 1982; Vaka‘uta 2011). Ka‘ili (2017b) argues that being in front and being in back within Tongan philology is a

reference to rank based on time. Those in front represent first-born people or elder titles, whereas those in back represent younger people and/or younger titles, who arrive later in time being "born later", figuratively and literally. The front is thus the past (elder) and the back the future (younger), which are socially negotiated in the present. When relations of both time and space are mediated effectively, positive feelings occur as a result of transcendent and communally participatory performances. For example, a relationship of time can include age, such as with elders or chiefly titled people, as well as historical events that are embodied in Tongan descendants or the time of day an event takes place. A relationship of space can include the distance of time represented in social rank, connective invisible space in between people and things, or specific contexts of physical place, such as the location in which a kava event may take place. For example, during one evening kava event in Aotearoa, embracing a slower pace of nighttime, there were acknowledgments made to the local Māori people of that land, including songs sung about that place and its association with the local indigenous people, which was both a temporal and spatial relationship being mediated by the kava participants—the local indigenous people being higher-ranking on the land in terms of age or time there, and the land itself as an elder authority as well. By relating in this manner, the Tongans and other Oceanians present at this kava event mediated the time and space between each other and the place they were in, a process that facilitated participants entering a temporally common level or state during a kava event. In these social relational performances and mediations between people and place, such as in a *faikava* 'common kava gathering', effective mediation might also be expressed as the phenomenon of "hitting it off". This phenomenon of "having positive vibes" or being "in the zone" with each other emerges when a state of *ngofua* or 'noa' has been reached.

Noa is a complex concept with various meanings that are contextual to people and place across the central and eastern Moana (a revitalised alternative name for Pacific Ocean[1]). However, in order to understand noa, we must engage with the ideas of mana and tapu that are intertwined in a constant process of mediating shifting relationships, potencies, and protections. Mana has a deep history of referring to various supernatural phenomena, such as thunder in the case of Tonga (Blust 2007; Turner 2012). However, as kava spread across the Moana after being domesticated about 3,000 years ago (Lebot *et al.* 1997), Blust and Turner both argued that a linguistic shift in the meaning/idea of mana took place, wherein mana became something that humans could also possess, do or be connected to. Mana became a potency, a generative force, one affecting fecundity, effectiveness, success, authority, honour and prestige that could be inherited, possessed and done, used by people and no longer relegated exclusively to natural phenomena

(Blust 2007; Keesing 1984; Mead 2016; Mills 2016; Shore 1989; Tomlinson and Tengan 2016; Turner 2012). Mana became something that could be channelled in human form, and a particular feature of chiefliness, which is diversely understood and applied in different contexts. Tapu is the protective restrictions, the setting apart and sanctifying of sacredness, which needs to be guarded/protected as potentially dangerous because of the potency of mana (Mead 2016; Shore 1989). Tapu protects mana or protects from mana, and they are inseparable. Something or someone becomes tapu because of possessed, embodied or manifested mana.

Noa is the successful mediation between relationships of mana and tapu, the neutralisation of tapu, a state of balance or equilibrium between mana and tapu, resulting in a temporal liminality of tapu. Noa does not then necessarily remove all tapu forever, and is contextually specific to people, time and space, but by neutralising tapu in a particular moment, a relation, space or object is rendered into a neutralised liminal state and can be engaged with intimately or without restrictive protections. One example is the process of vulnerable openness in talking story within relationally mindful critical oratory known as *talanoa* in Tongan. Talanoa comes from *tala* 'to story' and *noa* 'free/freely', which results when the mana of different individuals and their respective tapu are brought into a balance or commonality with each other (Tecun *et al.* 2018; Vaioleti 2006). This is supported through tauhi vā, which can be expressed by making genealogical connections with each other, gifting, or drinking kava together, which assists in rendering the mana and tapu of interlocutors noa in a particular moment, resulting in more intimate and free, unrestrained closeness in storying. Mills (2016) explains that noa and ngofua are equivalent terms, and there are also other different terms that refer to the release, neutralisation or calibration of mana and tapu. However, in pre-Christian Tonga, "the most common [term] was ngofua, meaning 'not tapu', 'permissible' or 'easy'" (p. 82). The word noa today is more commonly heard in our experience instead of ngofua, popularly meaning 'free or common' such as in talanoa, or the contemporary use of noa as the numerical value of zero. However, in order to reclaim and reposition indigenous knowledge, we contend that concepts must also be revitalised while being treated as living, adaptable and expanding. Thaman (1997) expressed that "as Pacific Islanders, we look for, and often engage in, a shared discourse, and although we may differ about the interpretation of the ideas and values of that discourse, we rarely reject or ignore it" (p. 123). We have chosen to use noa primarily throughout this paper instead of ngofua, recognising they are interchangeable words that are conceptually and theoretically connected (Greenhill and Clark 2011). Thus we argue that to refer to something as noa reflects a suspension of tapu relationships in a particular moment, context or interaction. Kava is a cultural keystone

plant species across much of Oceania, and not only does it correlate with the expansion of mana, it *is* mana, and thus can have the effect of rendering the tapu of individuals noa as they ingest it, while simultaneously making them tapu because they have imbibed mana (Aporosa 2019; Turner 1986). The antidepressant and soporific effects of kava are evidence of mana, as the anxiety levels go down and mental clarity remains, and the state of noa reveals truths otherwise restricted (Gregory 1988; Lebot *et al.* 1997).

This increased state of personal vulnerability in open sharing increases the potency and energy of kava events and rituals where noa is relative to participants within the kava space, which makes them tapu to those who are decontextualised by being outside of the circle/event. These phenomena are contextual to many factors, such as one's relational proximity or knowledge of a particular tapu. Kava events are thus significant sites of inquiry, knowledge production and healing, as realms of relational mediations, and as mediums of revelations of truths in participant behaviours, emotions and words. Truths in this sense does not necessarily mean truth telling, nor does it exclude speaking one's truth directly; it is complex and can also include speaking non-truths in comedic or roundabout ways that reveal truths about personalities or suppressed desires or thoughts. Additionally, the lessened restraints can reveal hidden curiosities of participants through behaviours exhibited outside of everyday tapu or public behavioural conventions, such as speaking profanely. Bott (2003) explains that kava ceremonies are like dream structures in that they reveal the subconscious even when people are not immediately aware that it is happening. This is not to suggest that cognitive function is altered but rather that increased sociability and decreased anxiety results in subconscious revelations of oneself and each other to become more visible and identifiable (Tomlinson 2004). Pollock (1995) adds that "[t]he 'power of kava' lies in its symbolism … it denotes Tongans coming together, where the bonds of solidarity may be enhanced around a shared cultural ethic" (p. 276). Kava rituals of all ranks and statuses share common functions of the potential to reach, establish and immerse within states of noa. Although they may appear to be more formal or less formal, "dressed up" or "dressed down", they are connected by this relational function and purpose (Perminow 1995).

TONGAN KAVA STORY AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF CEREMONY

One of the earliest mentions of kava in Tongan history was when Aho'eitu went to *langi* 'sky/heaven' to drink kava with his father, who was a Tangaloa (Sky God, Sky God Clan). He was killed and later resurrected out of a kava bowl, and would become the first paramount chief titled Tu'i Tonga (approximately 1000 BP) (Collocott 1927; Ka'ili 2017a; Newell 1947). The Tongan kava origin story is believed by many to have taken place after

this founding ancestral Tu‘i Tonga title was established, with a general consensus that the kava origin story refers to the era of the tenth Tu‘i Tonga (500–800 BP). The kava origin story appears to have been constructed after it already had a place in this society, yet would be transformed into a new ritual form from which the regal and title-bestowing ceremonies of today originated (Ferdon 1987; Hu‘akau 2018). The origin story of kava is about the young woman Kava‘onau, who was leprous, and who was offered up as a sacrifice to the Tu‘i Tonga by her parents (Ka‘ili 2017a; Māhina 2017; Māhina *et al.* 2009). Kava was then named after Kava‘onau, growing out of the *umu* ‘earth oven’ that became her tomb after the chiefly refusal of this initial offering (Biersack 1991; Māhina *et al.* 2009). The kava plant grew from one side of the tomb, while tō grew from the other side, after which Lo‘au instructed these be given as offerings. The kava origin in this ritualised context has gendered symbolism that represents chiefliness through femininity, and the principles and morals of sacrifice, truth, justice, beauty and love in Kava‘onau. When kava is ritually consumed, one in a sense opens oneself up to be possessed by the spirit of Kava‘onau, which includes these values.

The Tongan kava origin story took place with the guidance of the foreign chiefly advisor Lo‘au. Queen Sālote Tupou III explained that “whenever a major reorganisation of the country took place, the name Lo‘au crops up … The first Lo‘au is supposed to have played an important part in the origin of the kava”, which has become a vital part of Tongan social life (Bott 1982: 92). It is believed that Lo‘au helped restructure and recreate the society of that time during the era of the tenth Tu‘i Tonga, which was in turmoil and abounding in conflict. The new institution of kava practice included the values of dedication, sacrifice, responsibility and conflict resolution in Tongan society and culture (Siosiua Lafitani, talanoa/pers. comm., 2015). Hu‘akau (2018) argues that kava is a central feature in Tongan cosmology that serves as a blueprint for Tongan society and culture. Kava shapes Tongan people and gives their culture structure. However, he also commented that modern literal interpretations of the kava origin story overlooks Lo‘au’s political purpose and intention as author of the kava story. He proposes that Lo‘au constructed the story to symbolise the “sense of obligation and duty required to serve as the mode of operation for the society” (2018: 1).

Social values taught in the kava story include sacrifice and duty, which Hu‘akau (2018) argues cultivated a Tongan identity based on strict loyalty and dedication to their society. This idea is embedded in the kava origin story, where the grave of Kava‘onau was a result of both loyalty and sacrifice as an offering by the people and of chiefly refusal to accept such a burdensome sacrifice, demonstrating a value of not exploiting one’s own people (Biersack 1991). Chiefly duty and responsibility thus also included making the land fruitful. Chiefly mana includes a responsibility of propagating and generating

life, such as bounteous harvests to fulfil one's chiefly *fatongia* 'sacred duty' (Ka'ili 2017a; Siosiua Lafitani, pers. comm., 2015; Shore 1989; Tomlinson and Tengan 2016). Tongan fatongia is also demonstrated in Kava'onau's parents, Fefafa and Fevanga, who offered the most precious offering they could to the high chief. In addition to mediating fatongia and power between chiefs and the people, kava is also used in some circumstances to resolve conflicts on a smaller scale by asking for forgiveness through presenting kava and engaging in talanoa. It is important to note here that kava has been gendered differently throughout time, and thus also reveals the gender dynamic at a particular time in Tongan history and culture. Prior to European contact, Tongan women of various ranks, such as chiefs, priestesses or even those of "common" rank, are recorded to have participated in various kava practices (Bott 1982; Dale 2008; Ferdon 1987; Latukefu 2014). Anciently there were also goddesses of different realms who drank kava (Gifford 1924). Since the modern national formation of the Kingdom of Tonga, kava has generally come to be gendered as a predominantly or exclusively male activity. However, in contemporary practices in Tonga, as well as in the diaspora, with older and younger generations, we have observed and participated with an increasing number of women who are reconnecting with and remaking the kava tradition.

There is another element of the kava origin story that could be poetic metaphor, not only for the establishment of Tongan cultural and social values but also for the origin of kava in Vanuatu (Luders 1996; Māhina 1992). Drawing from linguistic, genetic and botanic evidence, kava was most likely domesticated in northern Vanuatu, from which it spread west to Papua, northwest to Pohnpei and as far northeast as Hawai'i (Aporosa 2019; Crowley 1995; Lebot *et al.* 1997). Aporosa (2019) explains:

> [T]he *kava* plant was originally found by the Austronesian Lapita culture in northern Vanuatu around 3,000 years ago … [leading] to other narratives. For instance, this tropical shrub is asexual—without seeds and requiring manual propagation—which has led to its status becoming a "plant of the gods", believed to have been nurtured by the gods until the arrival of those first Austronesians in Vanuatu. This link with the gods is argued to imbue *kava* with *mana* (or spiritual power) … [and] its medicinal efficacy, which includes mild anesthetic, analgesic, and anti-inflammatory properties and antifungal, amebicidal, anticonvulsant, antimicrobial, anticancer, and axiolytic activity. (pp. 2–3)

Luders (1996) argues that there are close connections between the kava origin stories of Vanuatu and Tonga, possibly representing the kava trade that took place between them as well as caution by Tongans while learning of kava's effects. Common elements of the Vanuatu and Tonga origin stories

include a young woman's grave as the source of kava and, in some versions, the inclusion of a rat first tasting the kava plant. The versions that include observing Rat nibble on kava result in Rat stumbling about, and after nibbling on tō in the Tongan version, Rat regains unhindered mobility. Alongside this demonstration of balance between bitter kava and sweet tō emerge symbolic meanings and cultural ideals of communion between sacrifice and empathy to resolve conflict and maintain good relations. However, doubts and suspicions between power relations among Tongans also remain in this story's symbolism. In the case of the initial Tongan ceremonies there was a belief that the plant could be poisonous, and therefore *matāpule* 'orators/ talking chiefs' were to taste it first, which became part of the ceremonial protocols of the Tuʻi Tonga kava ceremony (Bott 1982; Kaeppler 1985, 2010). For example, in the Tuʻi Tonga ceremony the first cup of kava was given to a lower ranking chief to ensure it was safe.

Kava Chant and Tongan History

This section will explore some of the symbolic meanings in an ancient Tongan kava chant, which reveal heavy kava-drinking consequences, the early material culture of kava and various historical nuances. The following is a version of this kava chant that was written down and interpreted by Hūfanga ʻOkusitino Māhina (pers. comm., 2016):

Laulau ʻoe Kava (moe Tō)	*Kava (and Sugarcane) Chant*
Kava koe kilia mei Faʻimata	Kava, the leper from Faʻimata
Ko e tama ʻa Fevanga mo Fefafa	The child of Fevanga and Fefafa
Fahifahi pea mama	Chopped and chewed
Ha tānoʻa monoʻanga	A bowl as a container
Ha pulu hono tata	With coconut fibre as a strainer
Ha pelu ke tauʻanga	A fold of banana leaves as a cup
Ha muʻa ke ʻapaʻapa	A relative as a master of ceremony
Ha ʻeiki ke olovaha	And a chief to preside over
Faiʻanga ʻoe fakataumafa	Where the royal kava is done.

The beginning of the kava chant identifies the leprous daughter of Fevanga and Fefafa, Kavaʻonau, who would be the sacrificial origin of kava and tō. Tongan linguist Melenaite Taumoefolau (talanoa/pers. comm., 28 June 2016) shared the possibility of her "leprosy" being an exaggerated metaphor for the potential side effect of drinking too much kava for some people. The root word of *kilia* 'leprosy' is *kili*, which according to Churchward (2015) means skin, peel or rind. Kava dermopathy, dry, scaly skin that is painless

and flakes off, is a potential side effect of excessive kava consumption (Aporosa 2016; Norton and Ruze 1994). This condition is easily resolved by ceasing to drink kava for a time. Early Europeans in Tonga observed and recorded that kava drinking was an everyday practice, which would yield kava dermopathy among the older and frequent consumers of kava (Dale 2008; Ferdon 1987; Suren 2015). Forster wrote in 1773:

> They swallow this nauseous stuff as fast as possible; and some old topers value themselves on being able to empty a great number of bowls … The old men who make a practice of it are lean [and] covered with a scaly skin. (quoted in Suren 2015: 218)

There are also some who indicate that the physical appearance of the kava plant can appear to be leprous, which would position Kava‘onau "the leper" as a metaphor for the kava plant itself, which is a symbolic proxy for her body that must be sacrificed (harvested/offered) and buried (planted) (Aporosa 2019; Lebot *et al.* 1997). There is also the issue of the sacrifice that is "leprous", that is, a questionable offering. This part of the story may indicate the caution a chief has in relation to the presentation of kava and the fears of it being poisonous, as well as a potential covert slight by *tu‘a* ‘common people’ to chiefly power (Biersack 1991; Bott 1982; Kaeppler 1985). In this poetic expression, kava reveals a tension between *‘eiki* ‘chiefs’ and tu‘a because the tapu of chiefly relationships is made noa through the mana of kava. Kava is a prized sacrificial offering that honours chiefliness and simultaneously a critique of power, allowing for the potential to temporally balance and reconcile these relationships.

The line in the kava chant referring to kava being "chopped and chewed" refers to older practices in the preparation of kava by young adults (men and women), who had the best teeth and would chew the kava roots before they were mixed with water (Collocott 1927; Dale 2008; Newell 1947). The royal kava ceremonies today pound kava roots with rocks as part of the ceremony, which resulted from European influence that viewed previous practices of chewing as unsanitary. Additionally, Ferdon (1987) argues that early Tongan practices prior to the establishment of the kava ceremony by Lo‘au and the story of Kava‘onau may have consisted of only chewing kava roots without making an infusion with water. The material culture mentioned in the chant also includes *fau* ‘hibiscus fibre’, used to strain the kava, which is still in use today at *taumafa kava* ‘paramount chiefly/regal kava’ and *‘ilo kava* ‘chiefly kava’. Many older men commented to us that fau were still the principal kava strainers used in the common faikava gatherings in the mid-twentieth century in Tonga. The materials of faikava have since expanded to include fine cloth or synthetic strainers, and even nylons or pantyhose. The

banana leaf cup mentioned in the chant, however, seems to be obsolete now in any setting; this was once the primary type of cup used in Tongan kava gatherings. *Ipu* ‘coconut cups’ were introduced later, and likely by Sāmoans. There are some distinctions made in the historical literature indicating that the banana leaf cup, while still in use after the introduction of the coconut cup, was reserved for more formal occasions (Collocott 1927; Dale 2008; Ferdon 1987; Newell 1947; Suren 2015). Ipu are the more formal vessel used today when serving individuals in a taumafa kava and ‘ilo kava, and in many faikava as well. Various vessels are now also used in faikava settings, including plastic cups and metal or glass cups or bowls.

The end of the kava chant refers to the taumafa kava, a designation reserved exclusively for the royal kava ceremonies. Although it is common to refer to any kava ceremony today with the monarch present as taumafa kava, it initially refers to the original bestowing of a Tu‘i (paramount chief) title, called *fakanofo* ‘receiving title/name’. Additionally, with the adoption of Christianity and its integration within the Tongan constitutional monarchy, a Christian coronation for a new ruler is now also held. The coronation is for the instalment as the head of state, and the taumafa kava is the fakanofo of a Tu‘i title (currently the Tu‘i Kanokupolu, a younger sibling title in relation to Tu‘i Tonga). The taumafa kava also has different protocols according to particularities in lineage and title, as for example between the Tu‘i Tonga or Tu‘i Kanokupolu (Collocott 1927; Tēvita Fale, talanoa/pers. comm., July 2015; Kaeppler 1985; Newell 1947). A purpose of taumafa kava is to mediate the mana and tapu between chiefs across the *fonua* ‘land, heritage, placenta’ to make them noa in order for them to collectively authorise the bestowal of a paramount chiefly title such as Tu‘i Tonga or Tu‘i Kanokupolu.

Tēvita Ka‘ili shared that Lo‘au as a tufunga fonua created the taumafa kava in order to resolve conflict through fatongia (in Hernandez 2019). Ka‘ili further shared:

> Lo‘au was an architect who was able to divide the fatongia between the different clans in a way that would create harmony within Tongan society, so that you have an obligation to someone, who will also have a fatongia to you, that there would be a sort of reciprocity that would happen. (Hernandez 2019: 88)

The taumafa kava from ancient times to the present continues to negotiate power through this ritual to create noa between chiefs and people, renewing their relationship and maintaining or changing their status quo (Biersack 1991; Bott 1982; Māhina 1993). The current monarch and head of state, King Tupou VI, in the Kingdom of Tonga is said to have been officially sealed into that position and title only after the completion of the taumafa kava that took

place in 2015, which by establishing noa in the ceremony began a new era of time in place with this new ruler (*Tagata Pasifika* 2017). Another example comes from the late King Tupou V, who utilised the noa between chiefs and the people through taumafa kava to mediate a political shift towards a more "democratic" constitutional monarchy during a time of unrest. For example, during his 2008 coronation period and specifically in the taumafa kava, he addressed the political tensions at the time through a speech given by his nephew, who holds the chiefly title Ata (Statham and Heni-Statham 2017). Statham and Heni-Statham (2017) argued that it was this speech, during the kava ceremony, that reinforced the modern monarchy but also symbolically indicated the beginning of a transformation of its political power. This speech spoke of the Tu'i Kanokupolu lineage through poetry that identified their historical accomplishments, including the contemporary moment of relinquishing the near absolute power previously held, responding to the protests of the people. The point here is that the ceremony of taumafa kava authored by Lo'au continues to be used as a ceremony that reveals and suspends tapu with the mana of kava, creating noa between chiefs and their people, which can potentially and temporally resolve conflict.

KALAPU KAVA AND FŌFŌ'ANGA

The kalapu kava club is a growing phenomenon that began in the mid-twentieth century in Tonga (Sisi'uno Helu, talanoa/pers. comm., 2016; Malakai Koloamatangi, talanoa/pers. comm., 2016). Many previous practices of faikava, such as *tau fakalokua* 'kava at the end of a day's work', evolved into kalapu (Helu 1993; Tecun 2017). Helu (1993) argued that the kalapu is a monetised response to the global capitalist economy. Kalapu vary in their protocols, but are generally associated with fundraising, giving donations or even in some cases membership fees. The *li pa'anga* 'fundraising' has been utilised as a communal response to an intensifying cash economy and the circulation of commodified exchanges. Many kalapu faikava fundraise for community education projects to fund children's school transportation, fees, uniforms and more. In many cases when there is a hardship, kalapu kava is also used to raise funds for a community member in need. Kalapu kava are also generally assumed to be men's clubs, although as we have mentioned previously this is beginning to shift and there are also women's kalapu now, as well as multi-gendered kalapu and faikava events. Kalapu are known by participants as rich sites of camaraderie and community, yet for some frequent male visitors who are married and participate heavily, they can also be a site of tension for their spouses. In this way the function of kava to reveal truth emerges again, both facilitating closeness in some relationships and tensions in others.

Kalapu faikava also marks a political shift in Tonga that challenged the hierarchy and power in Tonga. The early kalapu in the 1950s are reported to have been quite formal, and some kava participants have indicated that they were instituted or supported by the late Queen Sālote Tupou III. However, these early kalapu were transformed within a couple of decades to be more egalitarian: places where people no longer sit in a designated arrangement according to rank and anyone can speak even if chiefs are present (Sisi'uno Helu, talanoa/pers. comm., November 2016; Malakai Koloamatangi, talanoa/pers. comm., April–May 2016). The rise of kalapu sought to make modern political rank noa during a faikava. This adaptation increased communication across political rank and religious divide and even between generations, with boundaries continuing to evolve in noa space. Perkins (2005) explained that students of Tonga's 'Atenisi Institute attended faikava sessions with founding critical educator 'I. Futa Helu. This was a way of exchanging and producing knowledge outside of university walls. 'I. Futa Helu was among the Tongans who were pushing for a shift in kava practices in the mid-twentieth century as well as being heavily involved in pro-democracy political movements in Tonga. He was a significant force in transforming faikava into a forum for community organising, debate and exchanging ideas (Campbell *et al*. 2005; Sisi'uno Helu, talanoa/pers. comm., November 2016). Professor Helu is described as a "young rebel" who through 'Atenisi Institute "pioneered *faikava* for both men and women in the 1970s" (www.atenisi.edu.to).

Many kalapu are established on the basis of village, neighbourhood, work or church denomination. However a different kind of kalapu was established in the 1960s where the usual boundaries of organising as a group do not apply and where everyone is said to be equal, which would come to be called the Fōfō'anga. The word *fōfō'anga* means 'pumice stone' in Tongan and is a reference to when these rocks are seen floating on the ocean surface and scattered across beach shores, coming from various origins. The Fōfō'anga kalapu was so-named because it creates a space for people and ideas coming from every direction to become one in this shared space. Tongans from diverse villages, social statuses and religious backgrounds attend. This kalapu originated in Tonga, but its ethos and network has spread across the globe and its name often has added appendages to locate it, such as one of the earliest kalapu to be established in Tāmaki Makaurau (Auckland, New Zealand), known as Fōfō'anga 'o Aotearoa (Malakai Koloamatangi, talanoa/pers. comm., April–May 2016). There are many branches and chapters of this kalapu throughout the world today. There is no formal seating arrangement, and if you have a chiefly, religious or elder title you "hang it at the door" when you enter. The Fōfō'anga, being one of the earliest kalapu, has influenced other groups to have members from all walks of life participating. Many faikava groups and kalapu are now not only diverse in rank, village and

religion but also increasingly diverse in gender and ethnicity, especially in diaspora communities (Aporosa 2015).

The innovation of kalapu maintains the function of establishing noa, while the expressions and performance to calibrate such a liminal state have expanded. New Zealand historian Scott Hamilton (2017) wrote in an online article:

> At about the time he was setting up ʻAtenisi, Helu and some friends founded a series of kava clubs where drinkers could sit where they liked, and talk to whomever they liked about whatever they liked … Futa Helu hoped that fofoʻanga would help to change Tonga, by providing a space where the kingdom's problems could be discussed. It is possible, though, that the democratic kava clubs have helped to stabilise Tonga, by letting men shed, night after night, their ordinary identities, and the burdens that come with those identities. Tonga is an intricately hierarchical society. Royals and nobles and priests demand and usually receive respect. A commoner who fails to tithe at church or bring a gift to a noble's wedding risks denunciation and disgrace … The fofoʻanga has become a liminal place, where Tongans can say and do things forbidden outside its doors. Inside the fofoʻanga the lowliest commoner can mock his country's nobility, or joke about his church. In a small, conformist society, the kava club is a sort of safety valve.

The safety valve that Hamilton explains as a function of the modern kava club phenomenon is a revitalisation and transformation of ancestral practices, which function as restorations of balance that can yield openness through states of noa.

Malakai Koloamatangi (talanoa/pers. comm., April–May, 2016) explained that the Fōfōʻanga kalapu was a radical idea in its initiation, and was reinvigorated during the 1970s by his father, Saimone Koloamatangi, and Siosiua Holiday Fonua (who held the title Tauʻatevalu). They were instrumental in the rapid growth of the Fōfōʻanga kalapu in Tonga and its expansion among Tongans living overseas. They are also known for forming string bands as part of their kalapu. Edmond Fehoko (talanoa/pers. comm., 2016) explained that the branch in Tāmaki Makaurau, the Fōfōʻanga ʻo Aotearoa, became an important hub of community organising during the dawn raids era in the 1970s that racially profiled and targeted Pasifika peoples as "overstayers" (assumed to be undocumented residents of New Zealand). Additionally, the Fōfōʻanga ʻo Aotearoa brought with them the tradition of fundraising for school fees, which today has adapted to help with university loans, and even providing scholarships, available to family members of the kalapu and community. When Tecun attended the Fōfōʻanga ʻo Aotearoa, he learned that one of the kalapu mottos is "Ko hoʻo meʻa ko ʻetau meʻa" (What is yours belongs to all of us [material equity]). Latu (2014) reported that at the Fōfōʻanga ʻo Aotearoa they "don't sell kava, it is free to everyone, even

visitors”. There is no hierarchy in their organisation, meaning they have no executive body that is selected to run the club; they just have a secretary. They believe this collective authority and autonomous organisational model is why it has remained in operation since its establishment, as these principles of governance have proven sustainable. The ideas of the Fōfō‘anga kalapu and their various chapters throughout the globe have significantly influenced the role of kava in the lives of Tongans and in the ethos of many other types of kalapu. Faikava plays a significant role in learning, particularly community-relevant knowledge such as funeral protocols, Tongan language, songs, stories, relational values, humour and genealogy (Fehoko 2014). These knowledges are accessed and shared through the noa space phenomenon that occurs during social kava rituals and gatherings.

CONTEMPORARY KAVA

Although kalapu are still expanding and growing in numbers with young people, new influences are also expanding the variations of kava practices today. For example, Tongan and other Oceanian university students in Aotearoa are discussing their studies and community issues in co-ed and gender-inclusive kava circles. The “funds of knowledge” from ancestral cosmology (e.g., kava stories) have also become transferable social skills of conflict resolution and negotiation of power dynamics, which supports access to and resilience in traversing tertiary education (Moll *et al.* 1992; Rios-Aguilar *et al.* 2011). Whether one is engaged in kava regularly or not, the cultural knowledge of kava can still guide one through new spaces and challenges.

Tongan sibling protocols often include distance or separation between brothers and sisters, such as in kava gatherings, but today even some of the more conservative communities are rendering this protocol noa. For example, some church-based kava events are integrating co-ed kava to include young women in the youth circles that take place in church halls, demonstrating generational shifts in shared spaces. Additionally, along with women, *fakaleiti/fakafefine*, ‘in the manner of a lady/woman’, *fakatangata*, ‘in the manner of a man’, and LGBTQIA+[2] folks are also participating alongside their cisgender peers in youth- and student-led faikava. The gendered practices of kava are coming full circle, whereas it is documented in both Indigenous Tongan stories and foreign observations that Tongan kava was not gender exclusive, as we have mentioned earlier (Ferdon 1987; Gifford 1924). The modern nation-state formation and adoption of Christianity marked a shift where women became less visibly present as kava participants and their previous power changed (Gailey 1980; Herda 1987). Women are often still stigmatised if they are kava participants today, but this is increasingly being challenged, subverted and transformed as women and other genders reclaim their place in Tongan kava.

Kava is also currently facing enclosure through global commodification interests by the hipster market, homeopathy and big pharma. Yet, while many "kava bars" are popping up, particularly in the USA, competing for access, distribution and rights to the kava plant, there are some Tongans and other Oceanians claiming their place in this growing popular trend. An example is the Royal Kava Bar in West Valley City, Utah, which was co-founded by the late Tongan entrepreneur Sione Toki, and is run by Lami Vimahi, Sanalio Mahafutao and Fusi Taaga. The Royal Kava Bar is a lounge where instead of being individually focused, some of the communal aspects of Tongan kava are facilitated with a group setting of booths and the purchase of shared basins/bowls of kava. They also often run a karaoke and are frequented by consumers from the local Pasifika community. The Four Shells Kava Room has also recently opened in Tāmaki Makaurau, including a Tongan woman entrepreneur, Anau Mesui-Henry and her husband, Todd, along with three other partners. The Four Shells Kava Room reflects Aotearoa's café culture with a twist, where one can hang out and spend time talking over a shared bowl of kava, and even play cards or board games. One can also purchase a single or double shell of strong kava, like the Vanuatu *nakamal* 'contemporary urban kava bar'. In both the Royal Kava Bar and the Four Shells Kava Room, Tongan and Oceanian women are increasingly found. While the public business approach to kava commodification comes with its own set of complications, some of the women we have engaged with have in their own way expressed it is a noa space to "traditional" gendered tensions that can sometimes limit their participation in community-based kalapu settings. The SquareRoots Kava Lounge in Provo, Utah, appears to be similar and also has a Tongan woman among its owners, Toa Sitaki. Troy Wihongi, a Tongan and Māori (Ngā Puhi) entrepreneur who has lived in both California and Utah and was recently based in Tamahere (New Zealand), has now moved to Thailand, where he is producing new kinds of kava bowls with recycled wood and running a kava lounge. Clive Bourne, a Tongan who is based in Kirikiriroa (Hamilton, New Zealand), has also established the Kava Root Hale, an extension of the Dox Brothers kava group that has transformed to facilitate local entrepreneurship. The Kava Root Hale, in addition to being the home site for the Dox Brothers, also offers corporate retreats where organisational teams can learn and engage with kava culture directly with the community and participate in the benefits of talanoa. These are some of the examples of contemporary kava adaptations.

Kava continues to expand, and as Tongans increasingly find themselves living across the globe, their kava circles are also increasingly multi-ethnic, pan-Oceanic and multi-gendered. Tongans maintain kinship ties while making new relationships with other ethnic groups. Likewise, they are increasingly subject to the global neoliberal political economy and diverse

racial, colonial and gendered politics in the island kingdom as well as in the overseas nation-states in which they now reside. Kava reflects these realities, reveals these tensions and at times mediates them through the potential to discuss difficult truths in the noa space of kava gatherings. During a faikava on a late winter's evening in Utah, Robert Reeves (talanoa/pers. comm., December 2015) shared with Tecun:

> One other thing, you know—traditionally kava is a ceremony, usually happens, weddings, funerals, or other royalty things. But how we've dealt with it here [is something] that I really love … There's been advice given, whenever anyone has moved up, it's just been a great thing. These guys as well they'll tell you exactly what's on their mind, no gloves, just hay makers ['boxing metaphor referring to a heavy blow or punch'], so it's a beautiful thing to have that. You can have so many friends that love and care about you and are honest, because if you are making mistakes they're not afraid to let you know that you're making mistakes and that's helped me kind of stay on the path and helped me to be a better person and community member.

Contemporary kava practices among Tongans and other Oceanians remains a powerful force for building and maintaining community, while being able to "keep it real". However, we also contend that the mana of kava results in various possibilities in common kava events, whatever their truth is, which is dependent on who is in attendance and their purpose.

A Warrior's Tale

Kava practices today also draw from mana to heal and maintain positive well-being. Bringing the past into the present we look to a story of one of the battles that took place in the early nineteenth century that would lead to the construction of the modern nation-state monarchy, the Kingdom of Tonga. The following is an abridgment of what Albert Taufa described to Gifford (1929). Taufa'ahau, who would become King George Tupou I and founder of the national formation of Tonga, was the presiding chief at a kava ceremony that was taking place the evening before invading Tongatapu island's western corridor. Instead of accepting the first bowl of kava, he held it up and asked who was strongest and could first infiltrate the fortress of Kolovai. Whosoever it was would be given his kava, an opportunity to seize mana. Havili stood and claimed it, stating he would do it. As soon as the kava ceremony was completed the sailing began towards the battle shores. The first troops to rush in were driven back and suffered many losses. Taufa'ahau is said to have been startled by this event and turned to call for Havili. When confronted by Taufa'ahau, Havili responded that he had imbibed the kava for this moment. Havili lifted his garment made of *tapa* 'barkcloth' then rushed the enemy facing nine men at the pond close to the beach. He felled all of

his enemy combatants, and the pond where this took place was later named *hiva* ‘nine’. The battle continued and the invading charge was eventually victorious. Newell (1947) comments that:

> The turning point in the battle was the gibe [by Taufa‘ahau], “Why don’t you assist the troops instead of mending sails?” to which Havili replied after the battle, “Have you forgotten the kava that I drank on Atata?” with the obvious implication that if he had drunk the kava under such circumstances, he could not lose the fight. The key to the victory is kava. (p. 406)

We share this story here to demonstrate that although many changes of expression and use have taken place, the past is before us and being reinvented. Like this story of old, contemporary Tongan warriors have also turned to kava and its associated mana in the multiple battles they face.

Robert Reeves shared the following story during a faikava session at the Ogden Kava Boys Kalapu about his service in the US military (talanoa, December 2015):

> We were activated, and we mobilised [stateside first] … we did a little over a year there, [and] while we were there we’d mix [kava] in the Barracks … There was another Tongan kid, Sungalu Lavulavu. Me and him and Mario would always try to faikava any chance we got. When it came to a bowl or cups we had none of it, and so the ghetto way of pantyhose [for straining], a little Styrofoam cooler, and red solo cups was kind of the ghetto way we had of mixing in the barracks. When we did deploy [overseas] … I actually got to fly out to Hawai‘i, and got a big cup and a couple bags [of kava] and I actually ended up taking them with me, because I was like, “Ah, you just never know.” …
>
> We were living in a GP tent in the desert, and we got our guys together. I mixed [the kava]. We have a triangle bandage in our medical packs that I used to strain, because socks were very valuable at the time and we didn’t have anything else that would allow the kava to strain out to the levels that we like … My buddies, they all loved it, you know, and then for the last bag I told ’em, “Hey, when we’re coming home, we’ll mix this one.” …
>
> One of the days when we were about to go back … just a couple of us, we were kind of, you know, in a nice little defensive position, and I was like, “Hey, let’s mix that last bowl”. When I was finished, I got out and I moved up here [to northern Utah], and I never thought I was gonna stay. I thought it was gonna be a short thing, but I kind of had some problems. I didn’t realize it at the time, but I think some of the big things that helped me get through those problems was the community that was up here, the people, you know, the love that I felt when I came back, to know that my brother struggled to sleep, he drank a lot of kava—he was very stressed out about my wellbeing, which I didn’t realize at the time. So coming back and seeing that, it was

> just a powerful thing for me that made me feel that this is where I belong … This is my home, these are my family members. I really feel that it helped me deal with my issues … [Kava], it's about bringing people together, it's about allowing people to talk, allowing people to grow … I know kava has helped me a lot in my life.

Reeves reveals the transportation of kava from past to present as well as its power in the lives of Tongans, Oceanians and those they share kava with. His experience also demonstrates how the mana of kava and the state of noa contributed to healing and positive well-being. Faikava was used to mediate pre-battle anxiety as well as the battles that followed after experiencing combat. Mediating mana and tapu and yielding noa led to vulnerability and open sharing, which reinforces long-term meaningful community and relationships.

* * *

The form in which kava is presented, prepared and used is dependent on many factors such as purpose, chiefly rank, participants and more. However, the ritual functions of kava, we have argued, remain constant, which is to yield noa. This includes using kava for the facilitation of conflict resolution (Māhina 2010). We analysed how the ancient Tongan kava story and chant reveals layers of historical nuances. The establishment of the kava ceremony by Loʻau to facilitate a mediation between sociopolitical power relations is now ancestral knowledge remembered in the kava chant. Kalapu branched off from these roots, such as the Fōfōʻanga, which represents a legacy of open dialogue, political criticism and community strength that have expanded Tongan kava culture. Common faikava gatherings based in the community adapt in form but maintain the function of calibrating relationships and creating spaces of revealing truths for Tongans, aided by the effects of kava and the social anaesthetics of story, song, comedy and poetry (Tecun 2017). We bring the past before us as we are mindful that what we do now is the past of tomorrow. Kava solidifies, elevates and gives honour and prestige to a particular event as well as potentially neutralises barriers or tensions through vulnerability in the state of noa, resulting in more meaningful communal relationships. Kava kuo heka (The kava is raised, prepared and ready to serve)!

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NOTES

1. The generic term for "deep ocean" in many Pacific languages, including Tongan, is *moana*. More recently "Moana" has also been used as a formal alternative to "Pacific Ocean" (e.g., Ka'ili 2017a; Māhina 2010).
2. LGBTQIA+ is an acronym for Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual, and recognises an expanding understanding of non-heterosexual, non-cisgendered and non-perisex people.

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