

Māori and kava: New drug fashion or re-engagement with 'kawa'?

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Abstract

The Pacific “cultural keystone species” (Garibaldi & Turner, 2004, pp.1,5) kava is uniquely linked with notions of mana (spiritual power) and used to infuse efficacy into celebrations and life events. The drink, made from this potent icon of identity, brings on feelings of relaxation without marked euphoria, aiding clear-minded talanoa (discussion) to facilitate important and/or contentious dialogue. The sharing and drinking of kava as part of host/guest formalities is used in bringing about mutuality and unity (Aporosa, 2019). It is estimated there are more than 20,000 kava users in Aotearoa/New Zealand on an average Friday or Saturday night, with increasing interest and uptake of this indigenous drink by Māori. Crowley (1994) reports that the Māori word 'kawa', literally meaning 'marae protocol', has its linguistic foundations in 'kava' and the practices associated with this cultural keystone species. This paper explores that linguistic union to ask whether increased kava use by Māori has greater significance than simply a new interaction with a foreign drug substance. Further, due to the use of kava in facilitating talanoa (discussion), the possibility of kava playing a similar role for Māori is considered, one linked to ancestral Pacific connections aimed at assisting kōrero (talanoa), cultural connectedness and practice.

Keywords: kava, Māori, kawa, tapu / noa, cultural re-engagement, kōrero

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Introduction

Several years ago, Aporosa was part of a group drinking the Pacific/Pasifika¹ indigenous beverage, kava, with traditional voyaging expert, Waikato-Tainui kaumātua (respected Māori elder) and academic, Hoturoa Kerr. There were other people of different ethnicities present: some Tongans, a Samoan, several Māori including Hoturoa and his sons, a couple of Europeans and Aporosa and his cousin, both of Fijian descent. On this occasion, those present were all males although mixed gender kava gatherings are not uncommon. They were seated in a large circle around a tanoa (kava bowl) in the living room of their host's house where Pacific artefacts surrounded them in a welcoming embrace. The topic of discussion was what appeared to be the increasing use of kava by Māori when Hoturoa made an interesting comment. Hoturoa stated, "Kava is part of Māori culture ... we Māori originally came from the Pacific, so kava is already in us" (Aporosa, 2015a, pp.65-6).

Several months later, Hoturoa's comment was published as part of a wider discussion that considered not only the changing face of kava users in Aotearoa/New Zealand (A/NZ), but also how some non-Pacific kava users had embraced the kava culture as a new aspect of their own identity formation (Aporosa, 2015a). That piece of work has not kept us from pondering Hoturoa's forthright statement. For instance, could there be more to contemporary Māori kava use than simply a new interaction with a foreign drug substance? Could kava have been used for centuries by Māori in A/NZ in metaphoric or figurative form as part of their tikanga and kawa (custom, practice)? Furthermore, could that metaphoric use make kava unconsciously 'familiar' to some Māori and, in turn, encourage its contemporary literal use?

This paper considers these possibilities. To do this, kava's importance to Pacific history and identity will be explained. Archaeology, ethnobotany, anthropology and linguistics related to early Māori and kava will then be considered. We will conclude by asking whether kava has the potential to contribute an added cultural maker for Māori as indigenous people of the Pacific. To assist readability and comprehension, 'Māori' refers to the indigenous peoples of A/NZ and Pacific Islanders/Pasifikans¹ as those of Pacific Island ancestry regardless that Māori have ancestral links to the Pacific, a theme this paper will also expand on.

Kava: The Pacific 'cultural keystone species' and icon of identity

Garibaldi & Turner (2004) explain the relationship between people and their natural surroundings. They state,

There are plants and animals that form the contextual underpinnings of a culture, as reflected in their fundamental roles in diet, as materials, or in medicine. In addition, these species often feature prominently in the language, ceremonies, and narratives of native peoples and can be considered cultural icons. Without these 'cultural keystone species', the societies they support would be completely different (p.1) ... 'cultural keystone species' ... [are] culturally salient species that shape in a major way the cultural identity of a people, as reflected in the fundamental roles these species have in diet, materials, medicine, and/or spiritual practices ... Keystone species may serve a particular culture materially in a host of different ways: as a staple food or a crucial emergency food, in technology, or as an important medicine. As well, such a cultural keystone species may be featured in narratives or have important ceremonial or spiritual roles. It would also likely be highly represented in a culture's language and vocabulary ... although the specific role a particular species plays in a culture may vary considerably, its designation as a cultural keystone species lies in its high cultural significance (p.5).

Kava (*Piper methysticum*) is undoubtedly a cultural keystone species for Pacific peoples.

¹ Pasifika/Pasifikans is a term often applied in A/NZ and Australia to those of Pacific Island ancestry as a collective and/or those who live in a 'foreign' country, whether as visitors, recent migrants, or even those born in that 'foreign' country, who identify first and foremost with their ancestral homeland in the Pacific Islands (Aporosa, 2015a, p.59). Although Māori are categorised as Polynesians, it is rare for Māori to be referred to as Pasifikans.

The kava plant and roots are known throughout the Pacific Islands and by its indigenous users by a variety of names. These include ayuw, dikoi, gamada, sika, tigwa (to name a few) in Papua New Guinea; sakau in Pohnpei (an island in the Federated States of Micronesia); maloku, monggmongg, namaluk and more than 40 other references in Vanuatu; yaqona in Fiji; kava in Tonga; 'ava in Samoa; evava in Tahiti; and 'awa in Hawai'i (Lim, 2016, pp.147-8). Kava's botanical name is *Piper methysticum*, and interestingly, is a close cousin of Aotearoa's native plant kawakawa, or *Macropiper excelsum* (see Figure 1). This kava-kawakawa link, specifically kawakawa's simplex linguistic form, 'kawa', is important to this current discussion and is explored in greater detail within the paper.

Kava grows in warm tropical conditions, is uprooted from three years of age and the roots are washed. In a few areas of Papua New Guinea, Pohnpei and Vanuatu, the freshly harvested roots are usually ground into a wet pulp and then mixed with a small quantity of water to make an extremely strong aqueous beverage. In Fiji, Tonga and Samoa, it is more common to first dry the roots, then pound them into a powder which is used to make a drink of less strength (Oliver, 1989, pp.301-2). Kava consumed in A/NZ is mixed using dried and pounded kava powder which is brought into the country as kava will not grow in A/NZ due to the climate (Singh, 2004, p.56).



Figure 1 Kava – *Piper methysticum* (left) and the Aotearoa/New Zealand native kawakawa – *Macropiper excelsum* (right) (Aporosa, 2016).

Botanists believe kava originated in Vanuatu and was transported in a westerly direction as far as selected areas of Papua New Guinea, north to Pohnpei and several surrounding islands in the Federated States of Micronesia group, to most of the Melanesian and Polynesian island groups, and across to Hawai'i in the east – including south to A/NZ – starting approximately 3000 years ago by way of migrational spread and early trading (Crowley, 1994, pp.88,92,95,97; Lebot, Merlin, & Lindstrom, 1997, p.1; Marshall, 2004, p.201). Figure 2 shows kava's distribution based on genome typing evidence.

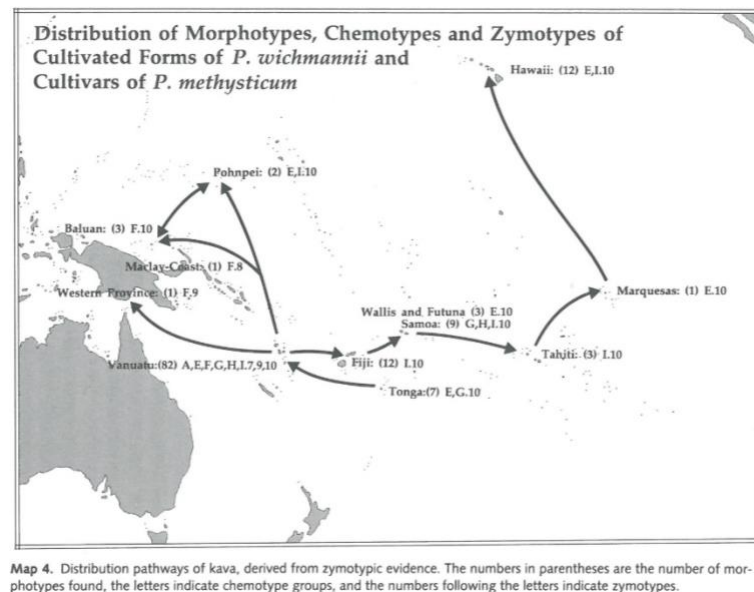


Figure 2 Distribution of kava across Pacific Oceania (Lebot, Merlin, & Lindstrom, 1997, p.52).

Vanuatuan anthropologist Kirk Huffman stated,

Early Pacific Islanders considered kava a desirable and tradeable commodity. It had to be traded because, lacking flowers and seeds, it cannot reproduce naturally ... well cut and wrapped fresh kava branches can be planted after sea voyages of up to two weeks. Thus, we can attribute the entire distribution of drinkable kava across the Pacific to the earlier maritime explorers of the region, long before the late arrival of European explorers (2012, p.25).

That transportation and subsequent cultivation in tropical environments that allowed for its growth, together with the ongoing use of kava today, is critically linked with mana, or spiritual power. While most Pacific people groups have their own kava-creation narratives (Lebot, Merlin, & Lindstrom, 1992, pp.122-128), kava's inability to self-propagate informs a common understanding in which kava is accorded the status of "plant of the gods" in which it is believed kava was nurtured by the gods until the arrival of the first niVanuatu (Aporosa, 2019, pp.2-3). Pacific peoples believe mana imbues or possesses kava as well as other objects, persons and actions (Aporosa, 2014, pp.63,68,174; Balick & Lee, 2009, pp.174-5; Brunton, 1989, p.111; Tomlinson, 2004, p.669; Turner, 1986, p.209), a function which is important to this discussion on Māori and kava. For instance, most indigenous users believe that kava acts as a conduit, carrying or infusing mana into events, ceremonies and practices. Kava ritual surrounding travel is an example of this. Kava is frequently presented and then drunk prior to travelling to bless and protect not only those making the journey but also those remaining behind. Additionally, kava is also carried with travellers to ensure safe passage and is then used on arrival to give thanks for the safety of that travel (Brison, 2001, p.314; Ravuvu, 1987, p.26). Pacific Islanders believe it is the mana in kava that makes this possible, giving efficacy to the events and practices in which it is used (Katz, 2012, pp.35-6). This, we would argue, adds to Huffman's reasons as to why kava would have been carried by early voyagers who often crossed and negotiated large expanses of rough unpredictable water. The carrying of kava for protection during travel continues today, especially among Fijians and Tongans travelling both nationally and internationally.

It is also common to present kava when you visit a village or house (Arno, 1985, p.130). Following the presentation, which consists of a speech that might also include requests, apologies, prayer, the acknowledgement of those who have passed on, stories, proverbs and anecdotes, the presented kava is then mixed and drunk to bring about mutuality and equality between presenter and recipient. Figure 3 shows the mixing of kava following presentation in Auckland, A/NZ. It is believed that it is through the final act of sharing and consuming this kava that the mana possessed by the kava is transferred between host and guest, resulting in the removal of tabu or tapu (sacredness, separation) (Brisson, 2001, p.331). This would suggest that early Pacific voyagers would have also carried kava with them to acknowledge those they met along the way, aiding hospitality and assisting resupply for ongoing travel.



Figure 3 Mixing kava following its presentation in Auckland, Aotearoa/New Zealand (photographer: Todd Henry, 2019).

Other uses for kava include its role in affirming the installation of a chief, blessing a newborn and acknowledging the passing of the deceased, through to consecrating a new house or a boat and, today, even as part of opening a sports or fundraising event to aid success (Aporosa, 2008, pp.34-8,100-1,109; 2014, pp.62-63,68-70). Many kava users believe it is the mana in kava that brings power, efficacy and action, leading to kava's use in almost every ceremony and practice from birth to death (Aporosa, 2015b, pp.79-80; Brisson, 2001, pp.315-6).

Adding to kava's significance is its wide range of medicinal uses, with efficacy believed to be driven by mana (Katz, 1993, pp.54-5; Aporosa, 2019, p.3). This traditional knowledge is presented in a valuable table compiled by Lebot & Cabalion (1988, pp.23-9). Informed from across the Pacific, this table lists illnesses and symptoms together with the appropriate kava preparation method for each condition. Medicinal concoctions of kava are used to aid lactation and insomnia, remove menstrual cramps, headaches, anxiety and tension, as a mild antibiotic and as a curative for urinary tract infections (also see Lebot, Merlin & Lindstrom, 1997, pp.112-117; Lee, Yee & Naing, 2007, p.88). Kava's medicinal value is also recognised in pharmacological studies, albeit disconnected from mana. Kava is being prescribed in the treatment of Generalised Anxiety Disorder (Sarris, Stough & Bousman et al., 2013), as an alternative to HRT (hormone replacement therapy) drugs for women (Cagnacci, Arangino & Renzi et al., 2003; Romm, 2003), and showing "good activity" in cancer research, specifically leukaemia, ovarian, bladder, breast and lung cancer trials (Lim, 2016, pp.155-8). Concerning the safety of kava, The World Health Organisation's risk assessment report states, "On balance, the weight of evidence from both a long history of use of kava beverage and from the more recent research findings indicates that it is possible for kava beverage to be consumed with an acceptably low level of health risk" (Abbott, 2016, p.26).

A further point is worth considering before focusing on Māori kava use, and that is: how does kava affect you when you drink it? While there exists a great deal of misunderstanding around kava's effects, with many believing kava 'is' alcohol, it is unequivocally not. (Aporosa, 2011; 2017a). Kava's effects are subtle and relaxing, bringing on a feeling of calmness, which is quite different to the arousal often felt when intoxicated

with alcohol (Kilham, 1996, p.64). Kava could best be described as feeling slightly ‘drunk’ in the body without marked euphoria, loss of clarity or mental processing (Chanwai, 2000, p.957; Aporosa, 2017b).

Due to kava consumption not leading to alcohol-type intoxicant effects, kava is frequently used to facilitate talanoa (discussion) as it allows for quality decision making and dialogue (d'Abbs, 1995, p.165). Additionally, kava's mana aspect is believed to infuse potency and power into important topics of discussion at talanoa. Matanigasau provides a good example of this. Matanigasau is the Fijian presentation of kava as part of an apology and/or restorative justice process (Abramson, 2009, p.269; Cretton, 2005, p.405; Ratuva, 2002, p.157). Fijians believe that to perform matanigasau, or create a covenant or contractual commitment with another through kava use, and then to knowingly break or breach that agreement or apology, can result in the mana reversing its conciliatory and unitary action and cursing offending parties. Belief in the presence and power of these spiritual dimensions influence how people behave at kava venues, with respect dominating interaction. In Fiji, this understanding comprises the ethos and values system of vakaturaga (Ravuvu, 1983, p.104; 1987, pp.18-9). Further, Fijians, who call kava ‘yaqona’, often refer to kava use and drinking as ‘yaqona vakaturaga’ which illustrates the importance of respect associated with kava use (Aporosa, 2019; Nabobo-Baba, 2006, pp.97-8; Toran, 2014, p.237). Parallels with vakaturaga can be found across the Pacific. In Tonga, vakaturaga corresponds with anga fakaTonga, in Samoa, it is fa'aSamoa and tautua fatama'ali, in Te Au Maohi (or the greater Rarotonga island group), it is known as kauraro Rarotonga, and in Hawai'i it is ke'ano pono, with these values aligning with Māori tika (correct, right, appropriate way of being and doing). Primarily, it is respect that drives these values, with respect seen as a personal expression of mana (Haden, 2009, p.190; Taumoevalau, 2013, pp.135-8).

With kava used in almost every ceremony and practice from birth to death, whether to suffuse, invoke or transfer mana to protect travel, bless a child, remove tapu/tabu, to create mutuality and balance between host and guest, give efficacy to healing and medicine, aid talanoa, give meaning to apology and influence respect, this clearly positions kava as the Pacific's/Pasifika's “cultural keystone species”. Additionally, that positionality situates kava as arguably the Pacific's/Pasifika's most dominant icon of identity, a cultural marker that remains just as relevant today as it has done for over a thousand years (Aporosa, 2015b; 2019). How then does this influence Māori kava use?

Māori and kava use

Pasifikans living in and visiting A/NZ have been using kava here since the 1960s and 1970s, bringing it with them from the Pacific Islands where it grows (Aporosa, 2015a, p.62). It is estimated there are more than 20,000 kava drinkers in A/NZ on any given Friday or Saturday night with increasing numbers of these being Māori (Aporosa, 2015a, p.62)². How can we interpret this growing kava attraction for some Māori? Is it possible some of these Māori kava users see cultural reflections within kava and kava practice which appears ‘familiar’ to them and therefore encourages this attraction? As was raised in the Introduction, could this contemporary Māori kava use be a literal re-engagement with their former Pacific cultural keystone species, use that has until recently been restricted to metaphoric and figurative representation as part of tikanga and kava (custom, practice) due to limited access to literal kava. To consider that possibility, kava's migration across the Pacific, starting 3000 years ago, particularly the Hawaiki and Aotearoa aspects, becomes important.

In their anthropological text on Hawaiki, Kirch & Green (2001, pp.125,256-7) add to commentators such as Crowley (1994, pp.88,92,97; see Figure 4), Lebot, Merlin, & Lindstrom (1997, p.1) and Marshall (2004, p.201), who tracked kava's movement in an Easterly direction from Vanuatu to Fiji-Tonga-Samoa and on to Hawai'i, using linguistics and the initial Lapita settlement. Kirch & Green summarise their debate with this short but

² Due to kava's cultural importance, kava use and consumption can occur at any time during the day or night. In A/NZ, Friday and Saturday night events tend to draw larger numbers of users due to a lack of work for the majority the following day.

important comment; “the key point is that the use of kava ... was a part of Ancestral Polynesian ritual practice” (p.257, underline added for emphasis), confirming kava as one of Hawaiiki’s keystone cultural species.

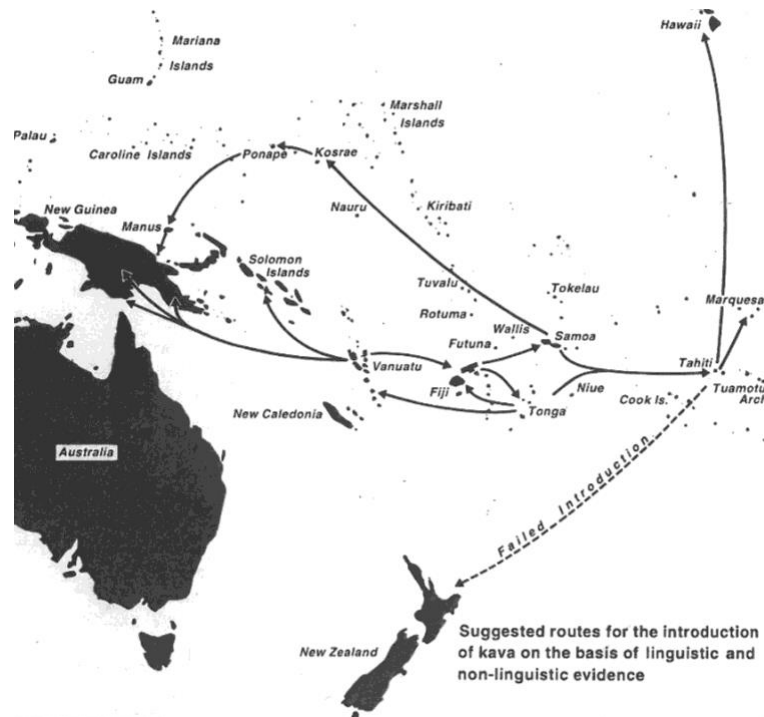


Figure 4 Distribution of kava based on “linguistic and non-linguistic evidence” (Crowley, 1994, p.97).

Māori anthropologists and archaeologists including Buck, (1964, pp.70,88,278), Adds (2012, pp.17-8) and Anderson (2014, pp.16-18,42) add valuable insight regarding Hawaiiki. They suggest that Māori left Hawaiiki, or present day Ra’iātea in Ancestral Polynesian Tahiti, and began their voyage south to Aotearoa, about 900 years ago. Admittedly, there is some conjecture over the exact route or routes taken from Hawaiiki to Aotearoa, although there is reasonable consensus that Te Au Maohi, or the greater Rarotongan group, was included as part of an island hop to get there.

By drawing together the key points from the discussion, this suggests: Māori’s pre-migration Pacific home was Ra’iātea; kava was an essential part of Ra’iātean cultural practice; Māori probably voyaged to Aotearoa via Te Au Maohi where kava was also central to the culture (Tai’a, 2003, p.268); kava was easily transported during voyaging; and kava is uniquely linked to mana, safe travel, acknowledgement, hosting, trade, apology, medicine, and a journey that was likely to put early Māori voyagers in contact with other Pacific peoples en route to Aotearoa. We would argue that, collectively, these key points make it difficult to believe that Māori abandoned kava in Hawaiiki, leaving behind this cultural keystone species when heading south to Aotearoa approximately 900 years ago (Finney, 1994, p.163; Mitchell & Mitchell, 2004, p.56). We are not alone regarding this opinion.

Crowley (1994) stated,

The first Polynesian migrants in New Zealand probably also brought kava with them, though it failed to grow in the colder climate. However, the plant kawakawa of the related *Macropiper excelsum* from a different genus (which the Māori used for medicinal purposes) is found there (p.95).

Moreover, it is what Crowley says next that adds potency to the discussion. He stated, “The word *kawa* in Māori is also used to mean ‘marae protocol’, which would accord with kava having been previously used in a ceremonial context as we find in Polynesia today” (p.95). It is in this statement that Crowley draws a clear link between Māori’s Polynesian homeland of Hawaiki, their new home in Aotearoa, together with marae formality in that new homeland and kava use in the Pacific.

Reverend Taylor (1805-1873), a missionary who was present at the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi (6 February 1840, Bay of Islands, A/NZ), makes an interesting comment in his book that adds to Crowley’s observation. He starts by presenting a Māori proverb – “E aha te tohu o te Ringaringa he kawakawa”, literally meaning, “What is the sign in our hands? Kawakawa leaves!” (1848, p.24). The language of the proverb indicates the significance of kawakawa as a sacred icon to Māori. Later in the book, Reverend Taylor comments that kawakawa – which Bock (2000, pp.176-7) called “Māori kava” – was used symbolically by Māori as “cava” when they first arrived in Aotearoa (p.100). Unfortunately Taylor does not elaborate on that symbolic use. He does add though, “the memory of the custom is preserved in the names of places where they [Māori] used to meet for drinking it [kawakawa], as Kawaranga, in the Thames” (Taylor, 1848, p.100). Anderson (2000, p.393) goes further, postulating that the Māori place names of Parekawakawa (at Kaikoura) and Te Kawakawa were also given by Māori to reflect their meeting together and drinking of kawakawa, a practice done in remembrance of their kava use prior to sailing south to Aotearoa.

These theories of Crowley, Taylor, Bock and Anderson could be interpreted as metaphoric or figurative kava use by Māori in the absence of literal kava after their arrival in Aotearoa. We would argue that this suggestion of metaphoric kava use gains added traction when Crowley is reconsidered, particularly his comment that, “The word kawa in Māori is also used to mean ‘marae protocol’”. Leading Māori scholars such as Professors Mason Durie (2003, pp.82-3), Paul Tapsell (1997, pp.327-8), Dame Anne Salmond (1975, pp.42-3) and Dr Cleve Barlow (1994, pp.61-2) explain that kawa and marae protocol are empowered by and facilitated through mana. Additionally, a key expression of kawa is pōwhiri (the welcoming of guests) with pōwhiri aimed at the removal of tapu between visitors and hosts to create the state of noa (mutuality and balance) (Mead, 2003, p.121; Salmond, 1975, pp.42-3). The final act in achieving noa within pōwhiri occurs through the consumption of kai (food) (Mead, 2003, p.124; Metge, 1995, p.297).

Pōwhiri’s culmination in eating is interesting when this process of kawa is compared with Pacific kava culture. As was explained earlier, a key practice, and one that continues in many areas of the Pacific (and diasporic Pasifika communities) today, is the presentation of kava when visiting someone’s home or village, spaces considered to be ‘Pasifika marae’. In the final act, following the speeches which are spoken ‘over’ (while holding) the kava, that kava – which is believed to possess mana – is then mixed and shared as a drink aimed at bringing about mutuality and equality between hosts and guests; essentially to remove tapu to create noa. Is it possible then, that after Māori arrived in Aotearoa approximately 800 years ago (as suggested by archaeological findings), and following the unavailability of kava whether from limited incoming supplies or an inability to grow it due to the cold, that Māori substituted kai for kava? Has kai become metaphoric kava as part of kawa/pōwhiri/tapu/noa in the absence of literal kava; metaphoric representation we see today within every pōwhiri and whakatau (a “less formal” version of pōwhiri) (Tipene-Matua, Phillips, Cram et al., 2009, p.3)? This is something Aporosa has pondered for some years, especially when attending pōwhiri and whakatau. Admittedly, feasting as part of hospitality is important to both Māori and Pacific Islanders, however, is there more to the use of kai as part of pōwhiri and whakatau, one that has metaphoric links to kava use aimed at removing tapu to create noa?

We have been a little hesitant to suggest this metaphoric use of kava by Māori, not wanting to infer cultural hijacking. However, recently, several Māori kava drinkers have reported similar beliefs. For instance, Dale

(Raukawa ki Wharepūhanga), spoke about her experiences with kava which has included drinking the traditional beverage on-board Uto Ni Yalo, the Fijian voyaging waka hourua (double-hulled canoes), and also kava use within the tertiary sector where it was used to facilitate student learning. She also described the fluidity of tikanga and how it can evolve and adapt to time and place, suggesting to her a link between kai and kava. Dale commented, “Kai has always been that indicator that moves us from tapu to noa, from one space to another... Kai, in a similar manner to kava, plays a dominant role in our interactive experience, providing a key input to culturally evolving spaces” (personal communication, January 31, 2019). For Kelly (Ngati Wai), she explained the practice of kava ceremony as a process of uniting which she felt mirrored pōwhiri. She stated, “kava could be viewed within te ao Māori as kotahitanga [togetherness] and manaakitanga [the process of showing respect], being together as one where everyone is nurtured and cared for around the tanoa [kava bowl] evokes a sense of manaakitanga” (personal communication, January 23, 2019).

Ideas of kotahitanga and manaakitanga were also voiced by, Tamati (Ngati Kahungunu). He explained that for him, kava sessions have always been an opportunity to sit with friends and strangers and discuss a variety of topics in a safe environment. He added, “[kava sessions] can be aligned to tapu/noa as some sessions are of a serious nature, being able to find a space to talk, similar to restorative justice in righting wrongs between two parties. It is a positive experience with great outcomes in the end, sharing the kava with the two groups” (personal communication, February 7, 2019). This resonates with our discussion earlier in this paper regarding kava’s role in matanigasau, the Fijian process of restorative justice. Long time kava drinker Jerome (Waikato-Tainui, Figure 5) stated, “The kava presentation is like the marae; you get welcomed onto the marae, speeches, koha [gift giving], sharing together. I see all of that in the kava presentation, same things, same values... For me, even as a Māori, kava feels right, like ‘it’s me’, it feels familiar... It’s not even really about the drinking of the kava, but the connection you have with others when you do it... When you drink like this, with culture, you see the wairua [spiritual] in the kava session, you can feel kava is in us Māori too, and you connect to kava and the ancestors and the people you are with. But then us Māori and Polynesians, we are cousins anyway, and then kava brings us back together again, it unites us as one people” (personal communication, November 14, 2016).



These Māori, who report notions of parallel between kava ceremony and kava, are also utilising kava to assist their kōrero (discussion). Similarly, when we visit these Māori and drink kava with them, their kava-kōrero environments are familiar to us, appearing to reflect Pacific/Pasifika culture. Instead of Fijians, Tongans or Samoans using kava in talanoa, these are Māori using the relaxing non-inebriating cultural icon and drink to facilitate kōrero that includes respect and the observance of chiefly tikanga values. We have also been present when some of these same Māori kava users have utilised kava as part of apology and/or to flesh out agreements. Additionally, we have heard some of those same Māori echo Pacific/Pasifika kava users in espousing the value of kava over alcohol, specifically kava’s relaxant clear-minded effects that do not impair judgement or promote argumentativeness and aggression. Jerome stated, “I have seen the benefits of kava for some of my Māori mates who have got into trouble with alcohol. Alcohol is a big part of us Māori

Figure 5 Jerome Kaka (Waikato-Tainui) drinking kava (Aporosa, 2016).

today, after sports, whenever, we grab a beer and some of my mates got into big trouble, even some were alcoholics. Then they started coming to drink kava. It started as a place for them to just drink, but then they started talking, getting help, other guys to talk to and be honest. Kava isn't like alcohol, you can get help and connect with the ancestors, use kava in a positive way. Honestly, I think kava saved some of their lives. It wasn't just about taking the cup [drinking kava], it's about the brotherhood and the connection. I know how much I have been helped by having somewhere to talk, learn from the older people, talk real stuff. I don't drink alcohol and it helped me just like my mates" (personal communication, November 14, 2016).

While drinking kava with Māori and observing their interaction with this cultural keystone species, Hotorua Kerr's (see Figure 6) comment often echoes; "kava is part of Māori culture ... we Māori originally came from the Pacific, so kava is already in us".



Figure 6 Hoturoa Kerr, his son's Namaka and Turanga, and Paki Rawiri (of Waikato-Tainui) drinking kava at the Kerr home (Aporosa, 2016).

Conclusion

Kava and the practices that accompany this cultural keystone species are steeped in Pacific history, ancestral connection and manifestations of mana. Kava continues to play a dominant role as the Pacific's/Pasifika's icon of identity (Aporosa, 2019), with its use becoming increasingly common in A/NZ, use that extends to Māori. At first glance, Māori kava use appears to be a new interaction with a foreign drug substance. However, when Māori's pre-migration cultural practices are considered, observances that are argued to have included kava as a cultural keystone species, this suggests that Māori would have deliberately brought kava with them when they migrated to Aotearoa approximately 800 years ago. With a lack of kava in Aotearoa due to a climate that prevented its growth, it has been postulated that Māori metaphorically re-duplicated the kava culture as 'kawa' within marae protocol. That suggestion drew on linguistic connections between kava and kawa and an explanation of kava's role in creating noa between host and guest, cultural practice Māori would

have been familiar with prior to migrating south to Aotearoa some 800 years ago. With the absence of kava in Aotearoa, it was suggested Māori substituted kava for kai (food) within pōwhiri and whakatau to create noa. Additionally, it was suggested Māori have been unconsciously using kava for centuries in a metaphoric and figurative sense as part of kawa (marae protocol)/pōwhiri/whakatau/tapu/noa in the absence of literal kava.

As Māori continue on their path of decolonisation, identity solidification, self-determination and tino rangatiratanga, could a day come when kava, with its medicinal benefits, returns as a literal Māori cultural keystone species? Could kava again sit alongside the dominant Māori cultural markers of pōwhiri, waiata (song), kapa haka (cultural performance) and rongoa Māori (traditional medicine) as a re-established and recognised element of contemporary Māoritanga linked to their ancestral Pacific roots, their pre-migration mana practices, identity source, kawa and tapu/noa? Could kava one day become the preferred 'cultural keystone substance' in facilitating socialisation, kōrero and cultural connection spaces for Māori? And lastly, could kava become the preferred social lubricant for Māori aimed at reducing anti-social behaviour, an alcohol side-effect which impacts all ethnicities?

Such a move would not be unusual and would reflect recent Hawai'ian cultural renaissance. By 1850, thirty years after the arrival of the first missionaries in Hawai'i, kava use and cultivation had mostly been eradicated (Kanahele, 1995, p.108; Titcomb, 1948, pp.165-7). Brown (2003) states that the missionaries considered kava use to be a reflection of Hawai'i's "natural inferiority", a practice that had to be "stripped" away as part of the colonial enlightenment agenda (pp.95-6,102). This had a marked impact on traditional knowledge. The 1970s saw a period of cultural renaissance, which included a renewed interest in, and use of, kava (Linnenik, 1997, pp.405-412). Tengan (2008, pp.12,62-3,216) describes the role that Māori played as part of that Hawai'ian cultural revitalisation and kava re-engagement, a partnership that could possibly be reversed to further aid Māori in reuniting with their former cultural keystone species kava. Although, maybe this is simply of our own desires and not something in which most Māori are interested. For us, that hope is driven by the pride we have in our Pacific culture (Aporosa as Fijian and Forde as Tongan), in kava as our icon of identity and cultural keystone species, together with kava's unique ability to bring people together, and facilitate meaningful (non-euphoric hindered) talanoa and kōrero within venues driven by respect. We simply pose these questions as it appears to us that there is a growing body of Māori who have already made that connection, a connection (albeit from a Tongan perspective) Māori TV also felt to highlight in their prime-time news programme Te Karere (Black, 2015).

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