Kava and Maaori: New drug fashion or re-engagement with ‘kawa’?

Apo Aporosa (PhD), Research Fellow (Anthropology/Psychology)
Jerome (Waikato-Tainui) drinking kava at my home
KAVA: yaqona, sakau, ‘ava, ‘awa (Piper Mythisticum)

Kawakawa (Piper Excelsum)
KAVA: yaqona, sakau, ‘ava, ‘awa (Piper Mythisticum)

The outer roots are located and the kava plant is carefully removed from the earth and then washed.
The roots (*waka*) are dried...

... pounded into powder...

... then mixed with water.

(Photos: Payson, 2008)
“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.”

MANA
MANA

...kava plays a unique role as a conduit through which mana is ingested and then suffused into a situation, event or third party...
Kava presentation to the crew of *Uto ni Yalo* (Fijian traditional voyaging waka) to protect their upcoming voyage. (Photographer unknown)
Kava ceremony to affirm Ratu Peni Raiyani’s (Ben Ryan, coach, Fiji Rugby 7’s) new chiefly title following Olympic Games.

(Source: FijiVillage, 29 Aug. 2016)
At home in Kadavu, Fiji, with the *whaanau*: My nephew Sivorosi Junior serving kava to his great grandfather Sivorosi Senior, the Tui Rauni.
We believe kava is both a *possessant* and a *transferant* of *mana*. 

**MANA**
So’otaga (welcoming ceremony) by the Waikato University Samoan Students Association, at the University here last week. (Source: Aporosa)
MANA

So’otaga

Poowhiri for new students and their whaanau, The University of Waikato. (Source: UoW, 2012)
MANA

This notion of power, efficacy and action of mana through kava has led to its use in almost every ceremony and practice from birth to death.

(Image author: Unknown)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PLACE</th>
<th>SYMPTOM</th>
<th>MEDICATION</th>
<th>SOURCE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tubuai</td>
<td>inflammation of the genito-urinary system</td>
<td>maceration of young kava shoots, orally</td>
<td>(Aitken, 1930–86)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pacific Islands</td>
<td>gonorrhea and chronic cystitis</td>
<td>the drink, orally</td>
<td>(Steinmetz, 1960–41)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hawaii</td>
<td>difficulties in urinating</td>
<td>the rhizome</td>
<td>(Handy et al., 1940–204)</td>
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<td>feminine puberty syndromes, weakness</td>
<td>drinking masticated kava</td>
<td>(Handy et al., 1940–204)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>menstrual problems, dysmenorrhea</td>
<td>kava-based medication</td>
<td>(Handy et al., 1934–20)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>painful migraine headache (related to women's sicknesses according to Zepernick)</td>
<td>drinking masticated kava</td>
<td>(Titcomb, 1948–126)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>vaginal prolapsus</td>
<td>maceration of kava</td>
<td>(Titcomb, 1948–126)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>to provoke an abortion</td>
<td>kava leaves in situ</td>
<td>(Handy et al., 1934–20)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>headaches</td>
<td>masticated kava as a drink or masticated kava as such</td>
<td>(Handy et al., 1940–204) (Titcomb, 1948–126)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Detailed table of illnesses/symptoms and the appropriate kava preparation method**

... the kava “bring[s] the healing \textit{mana} to the work ... it is in the healer’s acceptance of the kava that the healing itself is accomplished. In that moment, \textit{mana} is said to become available, allowing accurate diagnosis.”

MANA

“speaking mana”

“mana [as] illocutionary force”

gives efficacy to situations requiring mana.

“Even a twig of kava would be enough, a twig that someone else might throw away or overlook”

Western Pharmacological uses of kava

GENERALISED ANXIETY DISORDER (GAD):

HRT (hormone replacement therapy) ALTERNATIVE:
Western Pharmacological uses of kava

CANCER RESEARCH:
Kava is not alcohol - it is not even fermented

Kava is **not** alcohol - it is not even fermented


... unlike alcohol, kava use does “not lead to violent behaviour” and does “not befuddle the mind and can be used to stimulate ‘clear-headed’ discussion”.

Respect values and attitudes underpin kava use venues:

- **vakaturaga** (Fiji),
- **anga fakaTonga** (Tonga),
- **fa’aSamoa** (Samoa),
- **kauraro Rarotonga** (Te Au Maohi),
- **tika** (Maaori).

Respect is seen as a personal expression of *mana*. 
‘Contractual kava presentation’: Kava being presented by the grooms family assuring the brides family that their daughter will be well cared for.

Solodamu Village, Kadavu, Fiji. (Tomlinson, 2006)
Year 11 student presenting kava plant as part of opening of school fundraising event

Richmond Methodist High School, Kadavu, Fiji.
MANA

Kava: Pasifika’s *cultural keystone species* and arguably our most dominant icon of identity.

(Image author: Unknown)
MAAORI KAVA USE
Drinking kava with John and Okeroa (both Waikato-Tainui) at the Waikato-Tainui College for Research and Development.

(Source: Wharetapu Takiare, 2014)
MAAORI KAVA USE

Liam (Tuhoe) and ‘Bones’ (Ngati Kahanunu)
“the key point is that the use of kava ... was a part of Ancestral Polynesian ritual practice”


Ra’iatea (ex- Havai’i) = Hawaiki


“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 genesis (which the Māori used for medicinal purposes) is found there.”

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“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”

"E aha te tohu o te Ringaringa he kawakawa". ("What is the sign in our hands? Kawakawa leaves!")

... kawakawa was consumed as “cava” when Maaori first arrived in Aotearoa.

Taylor, R. (1848). A leaf from the natural history of New Zealand. Auckland: Robert Stokes, at the Office of the New Zealand Spectator and Cook's Strait Guardian. (pp.24,100)

"Māori kava"

... early Māori potentially used *kawakawa* spiritually and even recreationally as a substitute for kava ... lost following the introduction of the 1907 Tohunga Suppression Act.

Aporosa, S. (2014). *Yaqona (kava) and education in Fiji: Investigating ‘cultural complexities’ from a post-development perspective*. Albany: Massey University, Directorate Pasifika@Massey. (pp.29-31)
MANA MAAORI

Comprising two elements: distinctiveness of Maaori as a people with their whenua, culture, heritage, language, toanga etc., and mana giving potency and efficacy to that union.


“Mana is enhanced when collective well-being is the outcome... inextricably entwined ...”

Maaori Kava Use

*mana* gives “extra strength and wisdom” to healers and power to traditional medicines ... *kawakawa* is a *taonga*

MAAORI KAVA USE
Rangatahi drinking kava
Māori Kava Use

Waikato-Tainui whaanau drinking kava at Whatawhata
MAAORI KAVA USE

Hoturua Kerr:

(Thatcher, 2011)
Hoturua Kerr:

“We [Maaori] talk about coming from Hawaiki [the pre-migration homeland of Maaori], but at the same time we are mostly inward focused and see ourselves as separate, with no Pacific link”.

(Thatcher, 2011)
"The arrival of the Maoris in New Zealand"
by Louis John Steele and Charles Frederick Goldie, 1989.
MAAORI KAVA USE

*Haunui* (waka haurua)

(Thatcher, 2011)
Hoturua Kerr:

"Kava has always been important to Islanders. Early voyagers would have taken kava with them, brought it here [to Aotearoa], used it here. Kava is part of Maaori culture, but we gave it up once we got established here...

we Maaori originally came from the Pacific, so kava is already in us“.

(Thatcher, 2011)
Drinking kava aboard *Haunui* (waka haurua)
(Source: Turanga Kerr, 2014)
PASIFIKA KAVA USE

- ‘cultural keystone species’
- most dominant icons of identity
- used in almost every event from birth to death
- a conduit for *mana*
MAAORI KAVA USE

- pre-migration kava use by Maaori
- likely use upon arrival in Aotearoa
- Seen metaphorically in place names, *kawa*, *tikanga*, and *poowhiri* and *whakatau* in the creation of *noa*
- Increasing kava use by Maaori
- Maaori perceived Pasifika separation
- “Kava is part of Maaori culture” (Hoturoa Kerr)
I am suggesting that some contemporary use of kava by Maaori can be interpreted as a cultural expression of pre-migration Hawaiiki, rather than simply a new interaction with a foreign drug substance.
MAAORI KAVA USE

- lack of inebriant effects ... clear-headed koorero underpinned by respect and chiefly values
- settings in which mana through kava gives efficacy to apologies, contractual agreements and important matters of discussion
- sit alongside poowhiri, waiata and kapa haka?
“Many of the colonial experiences encountered by men in Hawai‘i articulate with those of Māori men in Aotearoa ... our [increasing] indigenous discourse has been the direct influence of Māori modes of resistance...” (pp.201-2)
In Hamilton with my *whaanau* enjoying some *koorero* around the kava bowl with visitors from Auckland.