Ritual and Cultural Performance

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Performance of the Real Research Theme, University of Otago

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EDITOR’S INTRODUCTION

The Performance of the Real Research Theme held its inaugural event – the Ritual and Cultural Performance Hui and Symposium – from the 14th-15th of April 2016. Day one took place at Araiteuru Marae, and day two at St Margaret’s College, Otago University. Because this was the opening event for the Theme, the organisers agreed that it would be culturally appropriate in the New Zealand context to begin on a marae. Araiteuru is an urban marae, whose name and roots refer specifically to the ancestral waka (canoe) of the Kai Tahu iwi (tribe).

The hui and symposium used the following quote from Richard Schechner as a provocation:

{quote}Every day people perform dozens of rituals. These range from religious rituals to the rituals of everyday life, from the rituals of life roles to the rituals of each profession, from the rituals of politics and the judicial system to the rituals of business or home life. Even animals perform rituals (Schechner, Performance Studies: An Introduction 3rd ed. 52).{quote}

This event investigated the performativity of ritual and cultural enactments, with presentations addressing the question: what is it that makes ritual and cultural performances so compelling and pervasive in the contemporary world? In order to draw together as many strands of scholarship and practice as possible, we deliberately kept the provocation very broad. The question, and Schechner’s contentious proposition that rituals are ubiquitous and that even animals engage in ritual behaviours, provided a potent embarkation point for the 20 presentations that were given during the symposium.

Professor Paul Tapsell provided a compelling keynote address on the first day of the event, which traced the journeys of tāngata whenua from the ancestral marae Taputapuatea in Ra’iatea (French Polynesia). Although his address is not included here, its spirit, mana and scholarship, and its simultaneous tracing of origins and development of future-facing theory, is present in the papers that appear in this publication.

Other themes explored at the event included:

• rites of passage
• carnivals/festivals
• dance, music and/or theatre and ritual
• ritual in healing
• gender performativity
• food and its rituals
• ritual in sport
• ritual and indigenous worldviews
• culture and hybridity
• secular and sacred rituals
• liminal performances
• ‘traditions’
• performance in everyday life

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1 Marae proper are the open areas in front of wharenuī (meeting houses) where formal greetings and discussions take place, but the term also often refers to their surrounding complex of buildings. The term is being used in the latter sense here.
Speakers featured a mix of academics and postgraduate students from a variety of places and disciplinary backgrounds, highlighting the interdisciplinary and international nature of the Performance of the Real Theme’s research network. The papers themselves were a mix of conventional papers and practice-led ones (i.e. presentations where performance was the sole or primary means of communicating ideas). Contributions focused on theoretical issues connected with ritual and cultural performance, as well as some detailed case study analyses – particularly focusing on the Asia-Pacific region. This edited volume provides a snapshot of the hui and symposium’s richness and diversity.

The papers in this edited collection were subjected to a rigorous double blind peer review process, and only those deemed satisfactory have been selected for publication. Peer reviewers were chosen according to their research expertise and proven publication records in the authors’ fields.

The editors have several people to acknowledge and thank for their assistance in producing this publication. Our sincere gratitude goes to the authors and reviewers for their enthusiasm, expertise and cooperation. In particular, we wish to acknowledge Professor Paul Tapsell, who delivered the keynote talk on day one, and Associate Professor Ian Maxwell (whose contribution is published in this volume) for his presentation on day two. Maxwell’s presentation became a cornerstone address for that day, and provided a deftly-argued and provocative wero (challenge) for the remainder of the symposium. Special thanks to editorial assistant Massimiliana Urbano, the theme’s current research assistant, and to the theme’s Steering Group for their support. Thanks also to Araiteuru Marae and St Margaret’s college, to Rua McCallum – the event’s kaitiaki (guardian), our student helpers Dominic Houlihan and Shannon van Rooijen, and particularly Ryan Tippet (the theme’s former research assistant) who worked so hard to ensure the hui and symposium ran smoothly. Finally, on behalf of the Performance of the Real Research Theme, we wish to express our ongoing appreciation to the University of Otago. It is a privilege to be part of such a vibrant research network, and we look forward to further lively discussion and debate at future theme-organised events.

Jen Cattermole & Hilary Halba (editors), University of Otago, October 2017
The Limits of Ritual

Ian Maxwell

Abstract

This paper takes up and challenges Richard Schechner’s claim for the ubiquity of ritual, both in terms of his contention that “people perform ritual everyday”, and the claim that “animals perform rituals”. The paper proceeds by a close reading of Schechner’s treatment of ritual in his Introduction to Performance Studies, before turning to the work of the social anthropologist J. Lowell Lewis, who argues that far from being the original, primal ground for aesthetic performance, ritual is better understood as the most ramified, elaborate form of human performance activity.

Where, for Schechner, play is understood as something of a supplement to the permanent, efficacious functions of ritual, for Lewis, play in both developmental and in evolutionary terms, precedes ritual, and therefore has a stronger claim to ubiquity across cultures, and to the realm of the animals.

Keywords: Ritual; Play; Schechner; Cultural Performance; Lewis

“What is it”, the call for papers for the symposium upon which this collection is based asks, “that makes ritual and cultural performances so compelling and pervasive in the contemporary world?” citing, as a starting point, a paragraph from Richard Schechner’s magisterial Introduction to Performance Studies, a paragraph first published in 2002, and surviving into the third edition in 2013.

“Every day” Schechner observes:

people perform dozens of rituals. These range from religious rituals to the rituals of everyday life, from the rituals of life roles to the rituals of each profession, from the rituals of politics and the judicial system to the rituals of business or home life. Even animals perform rituals (2013, p.52).

In this paper, I want to take issue with the propositions advanced by Schechner here. At the very least I want to suggest that the two key claims—that “every day people perform dozens of rituals”, and that “[e]ven animals perform rituals”—are by no means as self-evident or as axiomatic as Schechner’s assertion suggests. My secondary concern—and this is a concern bound to my overall critique of Schechner’s writing here—is to at the very least call into question an uncritical invocation of the idea of ‘the contemporary world’ as a sensible, coherent analytical category, and to think about how a critical anthropology might set about reframing any such idea.

Given the constraints of this current publication, this is not the place to embark upon an exhaustive critique of Schechner’s vast oeuvre. Instead, this short essay will, first,
undertake a close reading of the texts from which the symposium’s provocation was taken, and, second, turn to an effort to delimit the use of the term ‘ritual’ in order to better focus the analytical bite of that term.

But first, to the paragraph quoted above, which appears on the first page of the chapter of his book, a chapter titled, simply, “Ritual”. The thrust of my critique here is that, in the first instance, Schechner has dilated the category of ‘ritual’ so far as to make it all but useless as an analytical category, and second, that he not only offers no evidence to support his assertion that “animals perform rituals”—and surely the onus is on him to do so—but that his account of what rituals are contradicts any such assertion.

Such a reading might be dismissed on the ground that the chapter in question appears only in a textbook aimed at undergraduate students, and that Schechner, elsewhere develops more coherent, careful arguments. However, this is perhaps the very best reason to read this chapter very carefully: I would want to argue that, in fact, the entire book all but captures the grounds and trajectory of Schechner’s huge and immensely influential body of writing. Indeed, in the 2016 Cambridge Introduction to Performance Theory Simon Shepherd refers to Schechner’s Introduction as the “Summation” (the capitalisation is in the original) in which “[t]he ideas [Schechner] developed in various publications since [1979] are brought together and re-stated” (2016, p.153). The very fact that it has provided the keystone for a symposium such as this present one speaks to its significance.

My argument will, then, use a close reading of Schechner here to reframe the question put to this symposium: what makes ‘ritual’ so compelling and pervasive in performance studies? And what is at stake in projecting this compelling and pervasive idea onto (the entirety of) the ‘contemporary world’.

So, how does Schechner introduce his readers to the idea of ‘ritual”? The groundwork is laid in the first, introductory chapter of the book, an introductory chapter that sets out from the claim that it is written by “a Jewish, Hindu, Buddhist, atheist” (2013, p.1). My concern here is not to dispute that Schechner understands that he does embody such a miscellany of potentially contradictory beliefs and/or identities: very few self-identifications escape contradiction, and such contradictions are frequently reconciled in the economies of social practice. I am more engaged by the epistemological territory staked out by the claim: the implicit aspiration to a pan-optic, protean capacity not only to approach and provisionally to align with difference and otherness, but to take on that otherness in an additive autobiographical self-production. The orientation towards a supra-contextual universalisation is redoubled in the retelling of what Schechner calls “The Victor Turner Connection” (2013, pp.17-20), the foundation narrative of Performance Studies as a discipline, in which, as most readers would know, the question of cultural difference is framed as a matter of variable content with respect to the trans-cultural consistency of the fundamental form of ritual and social process.

The chapter on ritual starts with the claim that “[p]erformances—whether in the performing arts, sports, popular music, or everyday life—consist of ritualized gestures and sounds” (2013, p.52). And the problem has already arrived: the word ‘ritualized’ has been smuggled in without any attempt to understand or outline what it might
actually mean, why this word might be a good choice. The next sentence appears to want to clarify the matter: “[e]ven when we think we’re being spontaneous and original, most of what we do and utter has been done and said before—by us even” (p.52). Schechner then extends this observation, suggesting that “Performing arts frame and mark their presentations, underling the fact that artistic behaviour is ‘not for the first time’ but enacted by trained persons who take time to prepare and rehearse” (p.52).

In none of this is there anything to predicate these kinds of activities—‘performing arts’—upon ritual per se. In fact—and this anticipates what I want to say later—the word ‘ritualized’, as I have just quoted it in the first sentence of the paragraph above, could be—should be—replaced by a less ‘loaded’ word, perhaps something like ‘routinised’ or, if we want to follow a different trajectory, ‘thematised’. So, either “Performances—whether in the performing arts, sports, popular music, or everyday life—consist of routinised gestures and sounds” or “Performances—whether in the performing arts, sports, popular music, or everyday life—consist of thematised gestures and sounds”. Schechner seems to want the word ‘ritualized’ to capture both these (apparently contradictory) ideas. However, using one (loaded) word to do this work significantly muddies the water. Much better, perhaps, would be to frame the observation in terms of a tension between routinisation and thematisation.

We should not be surprised, then, that as Schechner’s argument (and work as a whole) unfolds, ‘ritual’ figures so prominently; indeed, foundationally: he has smuggled into his very premise the verbalized form ‘ritualized’, which I characterise as deriving from a ‘small r’ broadly understood definition of ‘ritual’, which encompasses ideas about repetition, iteration, routinisation, and which he will soon elide with a ‘capital R’ definition of ritual, used to describe specific sets of special, marked practices. In turn, this ‘up-town’ frame of reference is then returned to bootstrap a vast range of practices into the rubric of ‘capital R’ ritual. Brushing my teeth, on this argument, is understood as a ritual, and on that understanding, become freighted with (an unmerited) significance: ‘everyday, people perform dozens of rituals’. The argument takes the form of a petitio principia: because of the initial use of the notion of ‘ritualization’ to encompass a broad category of ‘doing’, everything therefore, becomes ‘ritual’: that which is rendered by the process which takes its name.

A secondary concern here is Schechner’s use of the fallacy of misplaced concreteness. He claims that ‘performing arts frame and mark their presentation’. They do no such things, as ‘performing arts’ are not agents capable of doing anything. The missing term here is something like ‘people’: the framing and marking of significance involves acts of interpretation undertaken by the members of a specific, particular community, in a given historical and palatial circumstance. It is, perhaps, a legacy of Victor Turner’s formalist functionalism that human agency in such formulae is rendered at best as epiphenomenal, subordinated to structure and form.

At the same time, much of what Schechner suggests here is useful: there is a continuity between everyday doings—and we’ll have to think carefully about what word we want to use for the placeholder ‘doings’ here—and those kinds of doings which Schechner describes as being ‘framed’ and ‘marked’. However, Schechner takes up a different analytical trajectory.
For having set up the idea of ritualization as a fundamental process, he then invokes his earlier definition of performance as “twice-behaved, coded, transmittable behavior”, generated by ‘interactions between ritual and play’ (p.52). From there it is only a short hop to a definition of performance itself as “[r]itualized behaviour conditioned and/or permeated by play” (p.52).

This is slippery thinking. The terms ‘ritual’ and ‘ritualized (behaviour)’ seem to be used to refer to the same things, the ‘interaction’ that generates ‘performance’ on this definition consists of the ‘permeation’ or ‘conditioning’ of a fundamental ‘ritualness’, understood as the condition yielded by ‘ritualisation’ qua repetition. This is important: play is construed here as the supplement to ritual, rather than as being (co-)foundational of performance with ritual as the initial formulation has it: ‘interactions between ritual and play’. This interaction is revealed as being something that happens to, interferes with, distorts, the fundamental unfolding of ritualization.

The next paragraph moves to offer a definition of ritual itself. ‘Rituals’, Schechner claims, “are collective memories encoded into actions” (p.52). That may well be the case; however, the obverse is not also the case: not all collective memories encoded into actions are rituals. It is not hard to think of counterexamples. The account continues:

Rituals also help people (and animals) deal with difficult translations, ambivalent relationships, hierarchies, and desires that trouble, exceed, or violate the norms of everyday life (p.52).

This is Schechner’s gloss on Turner’s foundational framing of ritual processes as prophylactic mechanisms anticipating potential breaches in social order. As the paragraph develops, Schechner reinforces the hierarchy between ritual and play: “[p]lay gives people the chance to temporarily experience the taboo, the excessive, and the risky”, but rituals transform people permanently: “[i]n play the transformations are temporary” (p.52).

Then we get to the paragraph with which we started, and some further attempts to establish the anteriority and pervasiveness of ritual, including a claim to “the rituals of everyday life”, which, Schechner explains are “[l]ess marked . . . sometimes they are labelled as ‘habits’, ‘routines’, or ‘obsessions’” (p.52). Citing Roy Rappaport’s 1979 *Ecology, Meaning, and Religion*, Schechner claims that certain formal qualities” unify these diverse practices as “rituals” (p. 52). In a break-out box, Rappaport is quoted as offering the following definition for “aspects of ritual”: “the performance of a more or less invariant sequence of formal acts and utterances”, none of which are peculiar to ritual, but which are unique in their conjunction as ritual (Rappaport 1979 in Schechner p.53). For Rappaport, rituals “tend to be stylized, repetitive, stereotyped...and they tend to occur at special places or times”; rituals communicate but are taken “by those performing it to be ‘doing something’” (ibid.). Their efficacy derives from an engagement with the occult, as distinguished from “the patent”; the patent is that which “can be known in the last resort by sensory experience, and it conforms to the regularities of material cause” (ibid.).
Rappaport, as cited here by Schechner, *explicitly excludes* everyday practices: habits, routines, obsessions.: the break-out box stands in something of a dialectical relationship—in an unresolved tension, perhaps—with Schechner’s own position.

The argument then starts relying on a series of provisional hypotheses:

Performing rituals seem to go back to the very earliest periods of human cultural activity […] [cave paintings] seem to be of ritual significance (p.52). […] Archaeologists studying this cave “art” surmise that the rituals were probably performed in association with paintings and sculptures (p.57).

Schechner does carefully point out that he places the word ‘art’ in diacritics “because no one knows for sure what the makers of these works thought of them or meant them to be or do” (p. 57), while performing no such typographical reservations with regard to the repeated use of the word ‘ritual’.

When Schechner gets to animals, the evidence is even more slender. While sensibly setting out with a caveat about the dangers of referring to “the abdominal waggle and footwork of honeybees communicating to other bees” as “dance” (p.59), Schechner gets into some strange territory, proposing an “evolutionary scheme of ritual”, and claiming that “[a]nimals with simple nervous systems, such as insect and fish, enact genetically fixed rituals” (p.61).

The argument here relies on a line drawn from Darwin through Julian Huxley and Konrad Lorenz, and in particular Huxley’s use of the word ‘ritualization’ to describe the movement of certain patterns of behaviour away from an ‘original specific function’. Schechner quotes Lorenz as taking up this model, describing processes of mimetic exaggeration” and an associated “rhythmic repetition” as yielding “a ceremony” “which is, indeed, closely akin to a symbol and produces the theatrical effect” (Lorenz 1966 in Schechner p.60). Eugene G d’Aquila et al are quoted as claiming that

Human ceremonial ritual is not a simple institution unique to man but rather a nexus of variables shared with other species […] One may trace the evolutionary progression of ritual behaviour from the emergence of formalization through the coordination of formalized communicative behaviour and sequences of ritual behaviour to the conceptualization of such sequences and the assignment of symbols to them by man (1979 in Schechner p.60).

On this account, what is important is a process of formalization, which, through processes of evolutionary development, become interpreted (and interpretable) as ritual. Ritual, on this account, is, precisely, something that is conceptualized as such by those involved. However, the waters are muddied by the uncritical substitution of the word ‘ritualisation’ for formalization or, more correctly, a certain category error involved in assuming that the fact of the usage of a similar-looking word across disparate disciplines points to an underlying unity of referent. Such a substitution mistakes analogy for homology.
Paul Bouissac, in his contribution to *By Means of Performance: Intercultural Studies of Theatre and Ritual* edited by Schechner with Willa Appel and published in 1990, alerts us to the risks of forcing equivalence, referring to the:

[M]igrations of this concept [ritual] first from the domain of religion to ethology to the social sciences in a way which accounts for its current fuzziness if not inconsistency (p.195).

He continues, citing the work of Eibl-Eibesfeldt:

In addition to the classical definitions propounded by the sociologists of relation [...] to at one extreme, the ethologists ‘technical definition of ritualization as ‘the process by which non-communicative behaviour patterns evolve into communicative ones’ [...]’; on the other end of the spectrum, the term is used by some anthropologists of theological inclination with a value close to its primitive religious origins (p.194).

The desire, on the part of “[e]thologists, sociobiologist, cultural anthropologists, semioticians and a few others”, Bouissac suggests, with not inconsiderable understatement, to “integrate these various uses [...] within a unified framework in order to establish a posteriori the scientific or philosophical validity of the extension of the concept” has yielded a “certain conceptual confusion” (p.194).

Twenty-five years later, Simon Shepherd sharpens the critique, more explicitly focussing on Schechner’s tendency to move from analogy (that is, ‘these different practices bear similarities’) to homology (‘these different practices are versions of the same thing’). Shepherd demonstrates that while the very thinkers upon whom Schecher drew—Dell Hymes, Victor Turner, Claude Levi-Strauss, and Catherine Bell—were alert to the potential distinction between categories such as ‘performance’ and ‘behaviour’ (Hymes), ‘games’ and ‘ritual’ (Levi-Strauss), ‘conduct’ and ‘behaviour’ (Turner), Schechner took a different path. Where Bell, for example, warned of the dangers of ‘flirting with universalism’ (1998, p.159), Shepherd argues that Schechner “tends to work towards generalising diagrams and overviews which usually have the effect of forcing subtly different activities into imposed equivalence” (2016, p.159).

The fundamental orientation to an axiomatic universality yields a circularity that makes it appear that ritual must always already have been there in order for the concept of ‘ritualisation’ to have any coherence. Schechner himself recognises this kind of circularity a few pages later, when he describes the argument of ‘primal ritual’ advanced by Harrison, Murray and Cornfield: the primal ritual exists because of remnants of it in Greek tragedy; Greek tragedy contains remnants of a primal ritual; therefore there must have been such a ritual (in Schechner p.80).

The examples Schechner uses from Jane Goodall, of course, speak to a certain performativity and, arguably, theatricality exhibited by primates—a self-conscious presentationalism, perhaps—but it is hard to see how either of the examples constitute evidence of ritual in anything but the broadest, weakest sense (pp.61-62): a sense in which the term itself loses any capacity to identify something beyond the flow of everyday life.
Schechner then moves to something that is presented as a definition of ritual (p.65). All rituals, he explains, share certain qualities:

— the repurposing of ‘ordinary behaviors’;
— exaggeration and simplification of those behaviors;
— the development of body parts for display; in humans, this involves masks, costumes etc; and
— the behaviour is ‘released’ on cue (p.65).

He then seeks to distinguish human ritual from animal ritual in “two key regards”:

Rituals are calendrical;
Rituals transport persons from one life phase to another (p.65).

And this: “Animals do not wonder about life after death or reincarnation” (p.65).

On page 81, Schechner restates his foundational theory of the ‘use’ of performance “in every part of the world and in every culture”, in a “dynamic tension between efficacy and entertainment”, and offers a captivatingly broad curriculum for the grounds of performance:

[p]erformance originates in the need to make things happen and to entertain; to get results and to fool around; to show the way things are and to pass the time; to be transformed into another and to enjoy being oneself; to disappear and to show off; to embody a transcendent other and to be ‘just me’ here and now . . . (p.81).

The conclusion of this thinking is, however, notwithstanding the framing of a ‘tension’ between efficacy and entertainment, an assertion of the primacy of ritual: “[t]he shift from ritual to aesthetic performance”, Schechner states, “occurs when a participating community fragments into occasional, paying customers” (p.81). The position is clear: ‘aesthetic performance’ is derived from ritual, rather than from the ‘entertainment’ end of the efficacy-entertainment continuum.

If I have perhaps belaboured what I read as Schechner’s confusions here it is to make the case that we need better thinking about ritual.

Again, I will turn to my initial observation: it is simply not the case that “every day people perform dozens of rituals”. It certainly is the case that, in some cultural contexts, some people do perform rituals every day. However, I have not performed or been in a ritual today, and only rarely do I participate in a ritual in a mode of explicitly heightened, embodied, emotional, interpersonal, spiritual commitment.

Nor is the case that ‘ritual’ is pervasive in the contemporary world, although I may be convinced that ‘cultural performances’ are. The question of ‘compelling-ness’ also needs some further thought. The missing quality in all this is ‘a who’ for whom these kinds of practice are either pervasive, compelling, or both. Part of my answer to the question of for whom ritual is so compelling is that it seems to be particularly compelling for Richard Schechner; so compelling, that he appears to see it
everywhere, even in single-celled organisms, and places it at the heart not only of human being—that is, of cultural processes—but of all organic being.

The problem is, of course, that in so saturating the world with ritual, Schechner has distended the type to an extreme length. On this account, there is nothing that is not ritual.

This is the position taken by J. Lowell Lewis in his 2013 monograph, *The Anthropology of Cultural Performance*, a title which, as Lewis notes in his Introduction, nods to Turner’s seminal 1987 collection, *The Anthropology of Performance*. Lewis’s work takes up the critiques made by scholars including those mentioned above—Bell and Shepherd—proposing, in a manner he himself concedes, “that may appear to be old-fashioned” (Lewis, p.2.), a sustained, systematic critique and synthetic overview of the burgeoning field emerging at the interstices of performance studies and anthropology. Importantly, Lewis comes to performance studies from the perspective of anthropology: an anthropologist by training, sympathetic with “Turner’s and Schechner’s initial project”, troubled by what he sees as “piecemeal” approaches to theory (p.2), and the risks associated with the definition of key analytic terms and categories.

“[T]erms taken form popular discourse, such as performance” Lewis argues (emphasis in original):

[N]eed to have their scope delimited to exclude some meanings while at the same time avoiding the illusion of having a neatly precise and exhaustive definition […]. To be useful as analytic tools generic categories must exclude some kinds of experiences; there must be an answer to the question ‘What are they not?’ (p.3).

Perhaps the first step is to acknowledge that ‘ritual’ is, in truth, an analytical term, rather than a linguistic representation of a particular thing that exists in a simple, positivistic sense, or even in a Platonic, categorical sense. We might say, then, that ‘Ritual’ does not actually exist; rather, practices interpreted by particular communities of investigators as ‘ritual’, do (the formulation here is deliberately Peircian), and their existence, their being, is temporally and place-ially bound: the practices involved, and the interpretation of those practices as ‘rituals’ is always a matter of local knowledge. We know that a ritual is a ritual not because of any formal properties, or syntax, or qualities of the practices involved, but because it is a ritual for somebody. The question of ritual is always, then, a posteriori, empirical, rather than a priori, or categorical. ‘Ritual’ is a genre—a metagenre— which is to say, a classification: a heuristic used to draw distinctions in the world.

And we need to be particularly careful when we start deriving processes from the term: when we start referring to ‘ritualisation’ as a process.

For Lewis, the problem is partly that of the place of the word ‘ritual’ and its cognates in everyday language:

[T]erms which have a place in popular discourse, such as ‘ritual’, need to have their scope limited to exclude some meanings while at the same time
avoiding the illusion of having a neatly precise and exhaustive definition (Lewis 2013, p.3 citing Briggs and Baumann’s critique of genres).

So how might we start to clarify our use of the term?

Lewis takes as his starting point the question of specialness. In every human society, some kinds of human activity are marked out—framed—as being more significant, more special, more meaningful—than others.

Lewis disagrees with those who:

[L]abel certain animal activities as rituals, arguing that this is a projection of our interests onto them . . . This usage of ritual is . . . a metaphorical extension of human concerns, an elaborate anthropomorphism (2013, p.23).

Instead, he considers ritual to be:

[A] type of human special activity (a metagenre) and therefore not something that links us to the animal kingdom (as play does) but rather as something that separates us from it (p.43).

Lewis therefore also deviates from what he refers to as Turner and Schechner’s “speculative scenario of cultural development”, in which ritual is the lodestone of all human (and non-human) performative genres, to instead aligning himself with the thinking of Schiller, Huizinger and Bateson, “who would being the story of human cultural performance with the idea of play” (p.23). On this account, play is not something which, after the fact, temporarily conditions or permeates the foundational wellspring of ritual. Rather, play is itself a creative principle (Lewis here cites the work of Hans Joas), engaged by animals, through which the possibility of thematising particular behaviours is realised. This is an argument grounded not only in evolutionary thinking, but in post (Herbert) Mead-ian thinking about childhood development: children do not set out from ritual; they set out from play, from which certain practices are brought into particular webs of significance. The proposition that animals, and particularly mammals, play is far more sustainable than the proposition that animals engage in rituals.

Lewis appropriates the word ‘performativity’ to denote, specifically, the process of marking behaviour as special, and opposes it to the term ‘habituation’, which denotes the tendency for some behaviours, in some circumstances, to fade into relative obscurity: becoming ‘mere habit’, as it were. Play is central to these processes, insofar as play as understood as the ambiguous testing and affirming of limits, a process sometimes heightened as explicit reflection. Play precedes performativity on this account, in that performativity has been defined as the potential to frame stretches of interaction into thematised events, to allow them to be events involving self-reflection (2013, p.35)

Again, on this account, animals engage in play, but not in performativity, as they “lack the self-reflection to frame stretches of interaction into thematized events” (p.35).
The key distinction, for Lewis, is not, therefore, between ritual and play, but between marked and unmarked, between everyday and special. Everyday events disappear, become subsumed in the flow of daily life; at the same time, there is a potential for everyday events to move into specialness, to be taken up and made important. The opposite is also the case: what were at one time special events can recede into unmarked everydayness.

For Lewis, ritual is the prototypical kind of special event, and accordingly he defines ritual as “[t]he most important kind of special event performed by the members of any given human social group” (2013, p.43). Following John MacAlloon and Paul Tillich, Lewis argues that ‘ritual’ should be used to refer to practices which relate to the ‘ultimate concerns’ of any given community (p.56), and which are recognised as such. In effect, Lewis is suggesting that in the first instance we reserve the designation ‘ritual’ to denote “only those events [the given community] consider to be the most special” (p.43), along a scale of specialness.

However, specialness is only the first, even though the most central, of a set of criteria which Lewis proposes for thinking about special events, a continuum which includes ritual-like and ritual-derived (as well as proto-ritual) events. This proposal leaves out animal behaviour “and therefore any general formal patterns like repetition, formality, stylization, and the like, which are dealt with under the rubrics of habit and practice” (p.44). He also wants to distinguish ‘rituals’ from other kinds of human special events that are of lesser importance: ceremony, celebration, festival.

Further down the continuum of significance are, as Lewis suggests, habits and practices: the first term referring to individual bodily behaviour, the latter to routinized behaviour across groups, inter-subjective, public and widely available patterns of repeated action. Following Bateson, habit formation involves incorporation and embodiment, the acquisition of skills that, as they are more incorporated, become less visible. This is part of the process of the naturalization of culture; the deep-seatedness of habits leads to a kind of reification of habits as structures: as constraints on the possibility of action.

This approach is broadly in sympathy with that of Roy Rappaport, quoted approvingly by Schechner, not only in terms of the significance of significance, but in terms of Rappaport’s placing of a concern with the ‘occult’ at the heart of ritual—a factor that Schechner does not discuss in the chapter I have been reading closely, above. However, Lewis argues, in privileging questions of form and syntax, Rappaport’s position tends also to privilege the perspective of the outside observer, rather than that of those for whom the events in question are special. The test Lewis proposes, is not one of form, discernible from the outside, but of content, of meaning, of cultural process: matters best grasped emically, rather than etically (see Geertz, 1993).

I realise that I have not necessarily turned my attention to the question of the constitution of something called ‘the contemporary world’. However, I think that my response to that question is implicit in all that I have said. We do not live in a singular contemporary world. We live in many worlds, with many temporalities; this is something that is very easily overlooked in the context of a general discourse about globalisation and global cultures. As Arjun Appadurai long ago argued, “the
globalization of culture is not [necessarily] the same as its homogenization” (1990, p.307).

It is this question of meaningfulness in context, as a process of collective interpretation, that characterises the ethnographic project, rather than an attempt to subordinate questions of (local, salient) content to (general, formal) structure: the fundamental research question, then, is one of understanding the specific ways in which events are brought into specialness, and allowed to recede into average everydayness: how are the boundaries of genres differentiated and maintained? This research question alerts us to difference, rather than subjecting us to the rule of sameness.

At the same time, the question of the purported ‘pervasiveness’ and/or compellingness of ‘ritual and cultural performance’, even when asked of local, discrete communities, is a fascinating one, and in every case, a specific one. Where do we encounter a desire for ritual? When is ritual experienced in its absence? What logics of nostalgia (too?) readily ensue? In the absence of the kinds of consensual agreement on ‘ultimate concern’ that Lewis places at the centre of ritual, to what substitutes do people resort? Lewis proposes that ‘many people today’—not all of them, but many—“are living in culture-like social worlds”, in which they “wish for greater orthopraxis, for greater consensus and coherence” (2013, p.141); a wish that yields sub-cultural formations, united through shared habits and practices, effecting a kind of micro-evolution of significance through these performatives into ‘culture-like groupings’: voluntary rather than essentially-determined affiliations, as theorised by Giorgio Agamben in The Coming Community (1993). We might, too, register the promiscuous use of the idea of ‘culture’ to denote what Lewis describes as ‘clusters of relatively transient shared practice that loosely define social groupings, in contradiction to similar groups, all of which form and re-form rapidly and constantly’ (Lewis, 2013, p.142).
REFERENCE LIST


REFLECTIONS ON TAONGA PŪORO (TRADITIONAL MĀORI MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS) TEACHING AND LEARNING AT THE UNIVERSITY OF OTAGO

Jennifer Cattermole

Abstract

Using taonga pūoro teaching and learning at the University of Otago as a case study, this article argues that the arts can be a vehicle for social action to challenge Pākehā (New Zealand Europeans) dominance in educational settings. It sets out how the author has found constructive ways to decolonise Eurocentric ways of teaching music performance at the University of Otago. This article advocates in favour of using culturally responsive and culturally appropriate pedagogical methods that recognise, value and validate indigenous ways of being, doing and thinking.

Keywords: Pedagogy; Decolonization; Tikanga Māori; Matauranga Māori; Taonga Pūoro

INTRODUCTION

Schippers (2005: 225) states that, despite cultural diversity being “broadly accepted as an important factor in music education … many educational practices still display an essentially monocultural [read, hegemonic] focus.” I advocate in favour of changing this situation, arguing alongside other scholars (see Desai, 2010; Freedman, 2010; Freedman & Congdon, 2005; Tavin, 2010) that the arts can be a vehicle for social action to challenge cultural disparity in educational settings. As Hindle et al (2011: 43) state: “It is important for educational systems to recognize that all students have a right to expect teaching and learning that doesn’t disadvantage them by requiring them to leave their cultural identity outside the … door in order to succeed” (see also Bevan-Brown, 2003; Cross et al. 1989; Macfarlane, 2004; Whitinui, 2007). What is required in order to enable this success is “an epistemological and political pluralism that challenges existing [dominant] ways of knowing and representing the world” (Denzin, 2005: 948; see also Bishop, 2008; Bishop and Berryman, 2006; Bishop, Berryman & Richardson, 2003; Bishop & Tiakiwai, 2003; Macfarlane et al., 2007; Salter, 2000a, 2000b, 2002).

This article presents an auto-ethnographic reflection on my inclusion of, and engagement with, Kaupapa Māori (see Smith, 1997; Smith, 1999) informed pedagogies for teaching/learning taonga pūoro at the University of Otago. It outlines

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2 Auto-ethnography is characterized by self-inscription on the part of the ethnographer. It involves authors presenting accounts of events, experiences, interactions and relationships in which they have been personally involved.
what I’ve done to include and engage with matauranga Māori (Māori ways of learning, knowing and doing) in my teaching. The article is divided into five key sections: the first provides some contextual information on my engagement with taonga pūoro and its place in my teaching activities; the second outlines my efforts to follow tikanga Māori in my teaching; the third and fourth look at teaching methods and spaces; and the final section addresses assessment issues. Although there are important exceptions (see Gadsen, 2008; Hindle et al. 2011; Whitinui, 2007, 2010), little empirical research on culturally responsive arts education practices exists; this article is intended to contribute towards knowledge in this largely neglected area.

**BACKGROUND**

My taonga pūoro journey began in 1999, when I attended a taonga pūoro workshop given at Otago University by Richard Nunns. I was struck by the physical beauty of these instruments, as well as their haunting, otherworldly sounds. I was fascinated by stories about interactions between taonga pūoro players and local fauna, and about how the contours of natural landscapes and flora could inspire tunes. I was also impressed by how instruments that were at first glance quite simple in their construction – or even found on beaches, riverbeds or in the bush – were actually extraordinarily sophisticated in terms of their playing methods and the sounds they could produce. The sheer variety of the sounds that constituted each of their voices, and the bi- or even multi-vocality of some instruments, astounded me.

This experience had a powerful and lasting impact on me. In 2012, shortly after I took up a lecturing position at Otago University, I rekindled my interest in these instruments and asked the Music Department to purchase a selection of taonga pūoro. My department supported this idea, and the first members of our taonga pūoro whanau (family) – made by Nelson-based makers Brian Flintoff and Clem Mellish – arrived in early 2013. We’ve gradually added to our taonga pūoro whanau (family) ever since.

Initially, I approached the playing of these taonga with trepidation and caution. I wanted to learn as much as I could about the tikanga (protocols; the correct way to do things in Māori contexts) surrounding their use before learning more about how they are played. I was afraid of causing offence by my actions, and wanted to avoid any adverse consequences to myself – spiritually, and in terms of damaging personal relationships with Māori. I’m a Pākehā (non-Māori) woman, and believed that both my culture and gender could present barriers to my learning and teaching these taonga. From prior study of traditional Māori musics, I knew that certain songs/chants could only be performed by people of a certain gender, age or expertise; I also knew that songs/chants had very specific functions, and that performing these songs/chants for purposes other than those intended for them could carry dire consequences for their performers: illness or even death. I did not know whether these kinds of limitations pertained also to taonga pūoro, but suspected that was likely. I was anxious to avoid misappropriating these instruments, and to avoid using them in ways

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3 Instruments such as pūtōrino and pūtātara, for example.

4 Casual staff budget restrictions mean that we’re unable, at present, to offer taonga pūoro teaching in our department to indigenous practitioners (or indeed anyone else with greater expertise than I).
Māori would find culturally inappropriate or offensive. I was also not dismissive of any potential spiritual risks to myself.

A certain amount of prior knowledge of Māoritanga (Māori culture) provided some useful guidance. I knew, for example, about how certain activities and parts of the body were considered either sacred or profane, and that contamination of the sacred by the profane was to be avoided at all cost. Because the instruments are regarded as sacred, avoiding contact with profane things (such as food, or parts of our bodies such as our bottoms) appeared commonsense to me. Beyond this, though, I was plagued by questions: Was the playing of particular instruments gender restricted? Could certain instruments only be played in certain contexts for certain reasons?

Feeling paralysed by my lack of knowledge, I asked colleagues at the Music Department as well as the School of Māori, Pacific and Indigenous Studies for advice, but I was unable to find anyone who could help fill my knowledge gaps. At that time, I didn’t have connections to local knowledge bearers in the community who could help answer such questions. To help overcome this, with my department’s support I arranged for two taonga pūoro specialists to give workshops at Otago University. These workshops, conducted by Alistair Fraser and Richard Nunns, took place in mid-2013. Both Fraser and Nunns encouraged me to start using the instruments. Feeling enthused and somewhat reassured, I took their advice.

These taonga have become important to my teaching and community outreach activities. Since mid-2013, I have incorporated these taonga as part of my teaching on a range of ethnomusicology papers; in workshops held at pre-schools, kura kaupapa (Māori language immersion schools) and marae; and in a community music group I set up and continue to facilitate.

Rather than discussing all these teaching contexts, this paper focuses on teaching in the taonga pūoro performance papers and in the community group hosted at the University. While there are some key differences, there is also a great deal of overlap in terms of teaching methods and practices across these two settings; moreover, students taking the performance papers are strongly encouraged to (and do) attend the community group sessions. In other words, the community group is an extension of the classroom for students enrolled in the performance papers.

**Observing Tikanga Māori**

In both the performance papers and community group, we observe tikanga in various ways. When each new group meets together for the first time, we have an induction session. We sit in a circle, and begin the session by outlining the nature and

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5 Otago University students have been able to take taonga pūoro as a performance option in the MUSI140, 240 and 340 papers (Performance Studies 1, 2 and 3 respectively) since mid-2015.

6 The community group has been active since mid-2013. I put together a poster advertising a taonga pūoro group, and had a positive response. Our group has been active since this time, meeting once a week during semesters. There’s a small core group who come regularly, and also several members who make occasional appearances. The members are mainly Māori Otago University students, as well as overseas exchange students; occasionally their friends and whanau come along too, as well as people who’ve attended community workshops I’ve facilitated.
significance of mihimihī (a greeting which outlines your relationships to people and to the land) for Māori before taking turns giving our own mihimihī (or our own versions). We then turn our attention to discussing tikanga Māori that should be observed around and with the instruments. Tuakana-teina relationships are invoked in these settings with respect to sharing and developing understandings of tikanga Māori. In the performance papers, I adopt a tuakana role; whereas, in the community group, I share that role with other existing members of the group – including (from 2016) Rua McCallum, who has taken on a kaitiaki role with respect to the group. While the induction sessions are aimed toward guiding the new members, they also present an opportunity for older members to refresh their knowledge and to reflect and comment on past practices. Together, we arrive at a set of protocols, and discuss core Māori concepts that underpin them, such as tapu (sacred, restricted) and noa (unrestricted, ordinary). We also talk about the meanings of the term taonga pūoro, and discuss how the concept of mauri (life principle, vital essence) applies to these taonga and how it shapes our relationships with them. It has always been important to me that group members unfamiliar with tikanga Māori don’t just approach tikanga as a set of rules to follow, but that they come to understand the reasons behind these rules and thus arrive at a deeper understanding and appreciation of Māori culture.

There are various ways in which we observe tikanga Māori in how we interact with the taonga. We leave our shoes outside the door before the start of each teaching-learning session, as a way of acknowledging the tapu nature of the taonga and the temporarily sacred nature of the space in which we are interacting with them. We start and end every gathering with a karakia (prayer/invocation). Sometimes, a group member who knows a karakia will perform it, with everyone joining in with responses where appropriate. I’ve also printed the texts (and translations) of karakia from one of Otago University’s webpages,8 which has helped members who are not fluent in te reo Māori to join in. We spend some time practicing karakia and going over te reo pronunciation and their meanings before we perform them. One of our group members has recently asked a local kuia (female elder) to create a karakia specific to our group, and I am hopeful that this will eventuate and that all members of our group will be able to learn it. Sometimes, we substitute a blast on the pūtātara for a karakia timatanga (karakia to open a meeting), and substitute a whakanoa (removal of tapu) – or another blast on the pūtātara – for a karakia whakamutunga (karakia to close a meeting). For a whakanoa, we use water that is contained in a bowl that has not been in contact with food. We dip our fingers in the water, then flick the water over our heads. In order to preserve the tapu of the taonga, we make sure they do not come into contact with food or items associated with food (e.g. table cloths), or with areas of our bodies considered noa. We treat them with gentleness and respect.

While there are several ways in which we observe tikanga Māori with respect to these taonga, there is one key aspect I failed to observe. One of my regrets is that I was unable to find someone from the local community to bless these taonga when they first arrived at Otago University (it is customary for newly created taonga to be

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7 Older – younger sibling or cousin (of the same gender) relationships act as a model for contemporary buddy systems, whereby older or more expert individuals help and guide those who are less expert.
8 http://maori.otago.ac.nz/reo-tikanga-treaty/te-reo/karakia. The karakia timatanga that begins with the words “Tukua te wairua” is one that we use often. It seems particularly appropriate for use in our sessions, given that we are helping to keep a once largely lost tradition alive.
blessed prior to their use). Around the time of their arrival, taonga pūoro specialist Alistair Fraser gave a talk at the Dunedin Botanical Gardens on research he’d been doing on the taoka pūoro of Rakiura (Stewart Island). As part of the opening of that event, the instruments he had created during the course of his research were blessed by Kane Holmes, the son of local kaumatua (male elder) Huata Holmes. Alistair suggested I contact Huata Holmes, who bears an enormous wealth of knowledge about taonga pūoro. I tried using his work email address, but never received a reply. Only later did I discover that Huata had retired, making lack of a reply completely unsurprising. That the instruments were never blessed remains an important element of tikanga Māori that I remain uncomfortable about not having observed.

LEARNING/TEACHING METHODS

Personal experimentation remains the key way in which myself, my students and other members of the community group learn taonga pūoro. Everyone’s journey with these instruments is different. Even with information from a variety of sources (discussed below), the instruments take people varying lengths of time to learn. Persistence, perseverance and patience is required, and there is a lot of trial and error involved. There is also a lot of excitement though, when you hear a taonga’s voice for the first time, its breath mingling with your own; and also when you discover new voices for these taonga (whether the intention behind that voice is yours or the taonga’s).

Learning by experimentation has often been guided by information found from other sources. Learning from live demonstrators has, in my experience, been very effective as a teaching-learning method. My first learning experience was of this nature. I first learnt the technique used to play the cross-blown flutes when Brian Flintoff demonstrated it for me when I visited his Nelson studio – although it subsequently took around an hour experimenting on my own to make a sound on the length of bamboo Brian kindly gifted me. I subsequently employed the teaching method he modeled. In the first classes I taught, I’d try to impart what I knew about various playing techniques to the rest of the group by verbally describing and modelling them (i.e. using a practice-led approach). Taking turns with the instruments, learners would then experiment, with some guidance from me, until they could produce sounds. The benefit here for learners is that they have direct and immediate feedback from a more experienced individual, and the teaching can be tailored specifically to a student’s learning needs. This kind of aural/oral and visual learning replicates traditional teaching/learning practices. The trumpet-like pūtātara and pūkaea, at that early stage at least, were instruments that I found very difficult to play; my colleague Peter Adams, who is a brass specialist, attended a session and was able to give the group some really helpful tuition on embouchure. As I’ve become more competent with these instruments, I’ve been able to impart this knowledge to learners rather than being reliant on the skills of my colleagues.

In the absence of local taonga pūoro specialists with a public profile, the opportunities to learn from visiting experts are rare and greatly appreciated.

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9 Taoka is the Kai Tahu term for treasure, or something accorded high value.
10 Again invoking the tuakana-teina relationship.
Performances and demonstrations given by Alistair Fraser, Rob Thorne and Richard Nunns in recent years, have been valuable learning opportunities. I was also given the opportunity to participate in a wānanga held at Ōtākou Marae in 2015, working with a visiting Christchurch-based taonga pūoro group to create a piece for the opening of the national kapa haka festival Te Matatini.

Performances, demonstrations and wānanga given by visiting taonga pūoro specialists may be infrequent, but they present valuable opportunities to learn not only about how the instruments are played, but also about their uses and meanings. There is also often storytelling involved in the imparting of knowledge about taonga pūoro – whether these be stories passed down from the ancestors, or personal anecdotes about unusual (humorous or horrifying) events that have happened while playing. I often find these stories very memorable, and I – like others, I imagine – enjoy passing them on in teaching-learning settings. These stories about taonga pūoro, shared among players and to audiences, become part of the oral tradition surrounding their use.

What’s been particularly rewarding and fascinating has been that such storytelling often prompts learners (in Otago University settings) to relate their own knowledge and experiences, touching on things such dreams, emotions, aesthetics, and events that have occurred whilst playing. These stories have generated ongoing dialogue, which has been key to linking praxis to epistemology. Discussions have been wide-ranging, touching on and connecting physical, mental and spiritual knowledges. They’ve been an important way of acknowledging and valuing kaupapa Māori (Māori philosophies), and exploring some of differences in perspective held between and within different iwi. Group discussions that we’ve had have contributed greatly to our collective knowledge as well as to members’ self-knowledge. They’ve also sparked a thirst for knowledge in some of our members – a keen desire to discover and engage with the taonga pūoro traditions of their own hapu (sub-tribe) or iwi (tribe).

In addition to learning from visiting specialists, students taking taonga pūoro performance papers and members of the community group also learn from their peers. Although learners taking the first year performance paper (MUSI140) typically begin with no knowledge of taonga pūoro, they develop their skills over time at their own pace. In the higher-level performance papers, as well as in the community group, skill levels are varied from the outset. With such variation in skill level, a lot of peer-to-peer teaching-learning takes place, with those who are more skilled/experienced passing their knowledge to those who are less so (in the manner of tuakana-teina). The ako concept also comes into play, whereby learners become teachers and teachers become learners; i.e. learning is reciprocal. Myself and other experienced players are often the ones asking newer learners “How did you make that sound?” We all experiment with different playing techniques, and sometimes players come up with techniques that become widely adopted by the group (because they make it easier to produce sound, or because they result in a new kind of sound).11 Without hearing other people experiment, I doubt I’d have become alert to the sheer breadth of sounds these taonga are able to produce. There are certain benefits to holding regular group

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11 I’ve actually found some of the best teachers in this respect to be pre-school age children with whom I’ve done workshops (I think this has a lot to do with their imaginations, and their lack of inhibition compared to their elders). I’ve learnt a great deal about the sonic possibilities of various taonga pūoro from these children, where they’ve used techniques that had never before occurred to me.
teaching-learning sessions: They enable members to share each other’s discoveries, and also to develop an understanding of how particular instrument combinations sound together.

Outside of learning face-to-face, learners based at Otago University have taken advantage of social media as a way of sharing and archiving knowledge. Our community group has had a Facebook page since 2014. Currently, there’s 36 members; the site has become a network linking taonga pūoro makers and players from Dunedin and elsewhere around Aotearoa. Occasionally, classes taking the performance papers also set up their own pages, although these only last for the duration of each course. Learners have also learnt from, and contributed to, discussions on the nation-wide Facebook page of the group called Matapakitia ngā taonga pūoro.

Recordings (CDs, YouTube) have also been a valuable source of information for both the performance students and members of the community group. We sometimes spend time as a group listening to and watching recordings, discussing them, imitating them, and occasionally improvising around them while they are playing. We listen to recordings of taonga pūoro being played in a variety of contemporary performance contexts by a variety of artists, and also listen to recordings of traditional Māori songs and chants (e.g. the CD accompanying McLean and Orbell, 2004) in order to gain some insight into the kinds of tunes that might have been played on taonga pūoro in pre-European contact times. We also listen to recordings of a variety of native bird species, and imitate their sounds (not just their songs, but also other distinctive sounds: e.g. the sound made by the kereru [native wood pigeon] in flight, or the sound of toroa [albatross] beaks clacking against one another). YouTube has also been a valuable source of information about playing techniques. One instrument, the pūmotomoto, has a mouthpiece like that of a Japanese shakuhachi. In the absence of suitably skilled colleagues, I’ve found YouTube clips on how to play the shakuhachi really useful – at least as far as learning about the correct embouchures concerned.

Although written information on playing taonga pūoro is scarce, books by Dashper (1996) and Flintoff (2004) do contain practical tips on the cross-blowing method used for flutes such as kōauau and nguru that myself and people I’ve taught have found useful guides. More broadly, our playing has been informed by reference texts on taonga pūoro (such as Flintoff, 2004; and Nunns and Thomas, 2014), which provide a wealth of information about the instruments. Information about their meanings, uses and whakapapa inspire us and guide our choices of which instruments are appropriate for which particular themes and settings.

TEACHING/LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

In 2014, Otago University taonga pūoro performance students and community group members attended a film screening of a documentary featuring taonga pūoro specialists Richard Nunns and Horomona Horo titled Nga reo o te whenua: Voices of the land (Wolffram, 2015). One powerful message from this documentary was that the land itself (the sonic environment or natural soundscape) is an enduring teacher for taonga pūoro players. Dunedin’s cold climate, unfortunately, has precluded us from spending a lot of time learning outdoors, but students taking the performance
papers have occasionally spent time in the Dunedin Botanical Gardens, located within easy walking distance of the University. In that setting, we’ve listened to and emulated the voices of the land (the wind, the water, the bird song). We’ve also used the contours of leaves, rocks and skylines visible from the gardens to inspire tunes, in accordance with traditional and contemporary practice. I’ve developed, I think, a much greater awareness of my environment – particularly my local soundscape – as a result. Taonga pūoro are comprised of natural materials (wood, bone, shell), and give voice to physical and spiritual attributes of the land and its fauna and flora.

As mentioned above, most of the taonga pūoro teaching and learning I have been engaged with takes place indoors. I’ve found the choice of indoor teaching environment to have an important effect on learning. In this, I have been directly influenced by Karyn Paringatai, a colleague of mine who teaches at Otago University’s Te Tumu: The School of Māori, Pacific and Indigenous Studies. Paringatai has pioneered introducing pre-European contact teaching methods into an inherently Eurocentric, monocultural tertiary educational setting. For Māori in pre-European contact times, learning was undertaken at whare wānanga (houses of esoteric learning), often in total or semi-darkness. Karyn has found that turning off or dimming the lights has had beneficial results for her Māori performing arts students, including: Enhanced listening skills, increased information retention, and minimized embarrassment (Anon, 2015; Paringatai, personal communication 2016).

I found out about Paringatai’s method in 2014 due to publicity surrounding her receipt of the Prime Minister’s Supreme Award for Tertiary Teaching Excellence and subsequently adopted it in my taonga pūoro performance paper teaching. This necessitated a change of venue – from my office to Te Wānanga, a room located within Te Tumu’s premises (the same room Karyn uses in her teaching). Unlike my office, Te Wānanga has a high, vaulted ceiling (which is good acoustically, and also means that there’s enough space to play instruments like the pūrerehua); it also has no external windows as well as dimmable lighting. All taonga pūoro performance students at that time were based in Te Tumu, and the venue was familiar as well as convenient for them. For myself, learning in the dark did indeed help me to concentrate on the sounds; as a musician trained in performing from scores, I also found it made me feel less self-conscious and more freely able to contribute when the class was improvising together.

In 2015, we used a room at Te Roopu Māori (the Māori Centre at Otago University) for our community group meetings; from a learning perspective, this space was not as useful a space as Te Wānanga (it’s a small space, and you can’t dim the lights), but it did allow us to hold our sessions after work hours (5:30-6:30pm), which has enabled our membership base to broaden. In 2016, we changed venue again for ease of booking purposes – this time relocating to the rehearsal room and library in Allen Hall. The rehearsal room in particular has lovely acoustics; neither space, however, has dimmable lighting. Having tried several alternative venues, Te Wānanga is the one that works best for taonga pūoro teaching and learning, and I will attempt to book this venue for teaching-learning activities in future.
ASSESSMENT

Since semester 2, 2015, I’ve been responsible for formulating paper profiles for MUSI140 and MUSI240 in taonga pūoro performance. These are generic 18-point performance papers that can be taken in a variety of instruments. Formulating these paper profiles has proved a somewhat challenging exercise due to the inherently Eurocentric nature of the profile template. The assessment for these papers, as per the templates, comprises a mid-semester technical assessment and performance (each worth 15%), and a 70% final recital; students are assessed individually, even if they perform as part of an ensemble. For their final recital, students are required to provide the audience with programme notes – although this is not an assessed activity. The template has been devised to cater to students of western art performance instruments, despite students being able to take the paper in a range of non-western instruments (e.g. Javanese gamelan, Japanese taiko and Māori taonga pūoro).

I found this template problematic and limiting. The template assumes that the teacher will set pieces for students to learn. While there are pieces that have been written for taonga pūoro, much contemporary repertoire for these instruments is improvised; moreover, there is no standardisation in instrument manufacture (each taonga is a unique individual in its own right). As a result, I have been asking my students to work collaboratively to create their own pieces. I have encouraged my students to think beyond narrow, Eurocentric definitions of music as a discrete art form as well. Due to this, they have been thinking not only about the playing of taonga pūoro, but about the performance setting (spatial arrangement of performers and audience, backdrop, lighting, effects), costuming, and the inclusion of narration, singing and dancing. My students have also been very interested in the historical uses and meanings of particular types of instruments, and regard this (rightly) as a critically important aspect of their learning. Classes have occasionally asked if they could present short seminars every week as part of our one-hour group sessions, and this has proved a valuable learning activity for all involved. There are other activities we have been engaging in as well, such as having students make their own kōauau, and visiting the Otago Museum to see their taonga pūoro (those on display as well as those in storage), that have been built into the assessment for this paper.

In consultation with Karyn Paringatai (personal communication, 2016) and my students, we’ve collectively agreed that students should be assessed on the range of skills they’re developing and strengthening by doing the paper. These go far beyond technical playing ability to include, for example: the ability to improvise in a group setting; to work effectively as a member of an ensemble, which involves displaying mahi tahi (group work), whānaungatanga (building strong relationships), manaakitanga (supporting and respecting others) and aroha (love/care/concern); to devise a performance; and to communicate and express ideas effectively – musically, verbally and in writing.

Going through the process of devising the assessments for these papers has made me very aware of a need to discuss this ‘generic’ paper with other performance teaching staff so we can build in a greater degree of flexibility. For the time being, with my Head of Department’s approval, I’m modifying the assessments to better meet my intended learning outcomes in consultation with colleagues from Te Tumu who teach performing arts. As much of the assessment will involve groupwork, I’m also using a
self- and peer- assessment tool. It’s important to me the teaching and assessment in this paper be done along culturally appropriate lines, and that students can get full recognition for all the learning they’ve achieved. In addition to honouring Otago University’s commitment to upholding the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi, these modifications are very much intended to address disparities of educational opportunity and improve educational outcomes for our Māori students.

CONCLUSION

In this article, I set out to reflect on some of my experiences of, and attempts to decolonise, teaching and learning taonga pūoro at Otago University. I’ve been inspired by colleagues of mine who teach Māori performing arts (particularly Karyn Paringatai), and have been challenged to confront and find constructive ways of responding to the implicit monoculturalism of my department’s -40 coded paper offerings, which favour the learning practices and processes of New Zealand’s hegemonic social group (i.e. Pākehā, or New Zealand Europeans). I’m committed to using culturally responsive and culturally appropriate pedagogical methods, and to recognizing, valuing and validating indigenous ways of being, doing and thinking. Although I’ve taken steps towards this, I still feel there’s still a lot for me to learn, and that I will always need to remain flexible and adaptive.

I often question the appropriateness of teaching/learning taonga pūoro in Otago University’s institutional setting, and share concerns expressed by Schippers (2015) regarding what he terms ‘interventionist institutionalization,’ a term applicable to my own activities. However, the institutional setting of Otago University does provide a point of access to these taonga, and this article has outlined some of the ways in which myself and others have worked to transform this setting into a culturally safe and appropriate space. I also still harbour doubts about the appropriateness of my role as facilitator of these activities; however, positive validation from students and members of the wider Dunedin community gives me sufficient incentive to continue.

12 The Treaty of Waitangi was signed between representatives of the British Crown and more than 500 Māori chiefs in 1840. Widely considered the New Zealand nation’s founding document, the treaty’s three articles outline the rights and responsibilities of Māori and the Crown toward one another. Significant differences between the English and te reo Māori (Māori language) versions have, however, led Māori and Pākehā (New Zealand Europeans) to have different expectations and understandings of the treaty.
REFERENCE LIST


TANO’/LAND

Ojeya Cruz Banks

Tâno’ is a short dance film on location in the north-western Pacific island of Guåhan/Guam that belongs to the archipelago known as the Mariana Islands in a region known as Micronesia. Featuring the work of dancer anthropologist Ojeya Cruz Banks, who was born in California but her maternal ancestors are indigenous to the island. Visually illuminating the synergy between land and biography, her dancing embodies a somatic ritual informed by indigenous cosmology that views earth as sacred and where ancestral bones are buried. The film premiered at the 2016 Quadrennial Pacific Arts Festival in Guåhan and explores the complexities of identity, diaspora, homeland, and US military territorialism through vivid metaphors and poetic narrative. Cruz Banks calls Guåhan, her altar, her birth right and story; the digital narrative filmed on a smart phone is about rekindling bonds and activating spiritual consciousness about family and ancestral landscape through dance. In the film, she dances in patch of breadfruit forest of astonishing beauty juxtaposed to the US Marine Corps highway. Tâno’ counters race-based logics of identity with an indigenous Chamoru perspective of selfhood and social justice that is intrinsically connected to land.


PASSWORD: sunshine

REFERENCES LIST

“SPIRITUAL PLAY”: RITUAL PERFORMANCE AND SPIRITUALITY IN SAMOAN THEATRE

David O’Donnell

Abstract

Pacific Island (Pasifika) migrants in New Zealand have created a unique diasporic theatre, exploring the impact of migration on the family and cultural institutions. There are at least thirteen different Pacific languages and cultures in New Zealand, each with its own distinct ritual and spiritual traditions, such as the invocation of spiritual agency in the pre-colonial Samoan theatre form fale aitu. Aitu literally means ghost or spirit, and during fale aitu performances the lead actor “becomes” a spirit when in role, endowing him with a supernatural sanction that allows him to parody authority figures in the village. Spiritual beliefs in Pacific cultures have been radically transformed since the intervention of Christian missionaries from the 1830s onwards. Present-day churches foreground theatrical events such as White Sunday, during which children perform dramatic sketches and plays. Many Pacific performers had their first experience of performance at White Sunday. This paper examines performative strategies that manifest the spiritual dimension onstage in Samoan theatre. The fale aitu tradition has been adapted and hybridised in performances including Kightley and Ifopo’s Romeo and Tusi and Kneubuhl’s Think of a Garden, while Muagututia and Vaele’s Angels reconstructs a White Sunday performance onstage. Samoan theatre provides a distinctive case study of syncretic performance practice that re-interprets ritual and spiritual practices in the context of contemporary urban cultures.

Keywords: Pasifika; Diaspora; Fale Aitu; Performance; Samoan Theatre

INTRODUCTION

The congregation gathers in the Methodist Wesley Church in Taranaki Street, Wellington, where the back wall is dominated by a wooden cross and four colourful banners representing the congregations that share this space: Samoan, Fijian, Tongan and Palagi (European). The plush red carpet down the aisle continues up steps to a raised stage, where the Samoan service will take place. In this Lotu Tamaiti (White Sunday) service, the minister literally takes a back seat to the children of the congregation. At noon, the children gather at the church doors and begin singing the first of many hymns in Samoan. They form a procession down the aisle and take their places in the choir stalls. There are 34 children of all ages from pre-schoolers to older teenagers. All are dressed in white, symbolising purity. The girls wear white lavalavas, white tops with red ribbons and garlands of white flowers on their heads; some of the

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13 This description is based on my observation of a White Sunday service which my wife and I attended on 12 October 2014. We were honoured to be invited to attend as the only Palagi guests.
boys wear jackets and trousers with red ties or bow-ties, some wear white lavalavas. The minister welcomes the congregation and then takes a seat at the side of the stage as the children deliver the majority of the service.

Towards the end of the service, the children perform their “items” in family groups. Even pre-schoolers have their chance to be in the spotlight, the microphone is held up for them to recite a passage from the Bible they’ve learned by heart. Some of them are too shy when it comes to their big moment, others get a big round of applause. The older children recite Bible verses and perform action songs, moving slickly in unison. Some are very confident on stage, others are more hesitant. Mothers and grandmothers sit on the steps giving encouragement or helping out if someone forgets their lines. Toddlers wander freely throughout the church, sometimes joining the older children as they perform, copying the dance moves or inventing their own. At the end of the service the minister thanks everyone for coming to support the children, and they process down the aisle, singing in harmony. Once the formalities are over, the children rush back to the stage to take group photos on their iPhones and iPads.

Afterwards, everyone gathers in the hall which is set up with long tables for the feast. We queue up to load our plates with Samoan delicacies like taro, mussels, eel, squid salad and a special order from KFC. The Minister’s wife tells us how important it is that the children learn the Samoan values (fa’asamoa) balancing these with the Palagi lifestyle. Some of the children can understand Samoan but have difficulty speaking it. White Sunday helps the children gain confidence in speaking their language. Once the meal is over, the celebrations conclude with a group discussion where the parents give the children feedback on their performances.

**FROM CHURCH PERFORMANCE TO THEATRE**

For the children of many Samoan migrants in Aotearoa/New Zealand, learning to perform is a rite of passage that occurs regularly through the practice of Christian religion. Performances at White Sunday and in Sunday School link spirituality and performativity, within the context of maintaining a strong sense of community, culture and language acquisition. Given the centrality of performance to young Samoans’ education, perhaps it is not surprising that since the 1990s, Samoan theatre practitioners have made a major contribution to the development of a unique Pasifika theatre tradition in Aotearoa/New Zealand. Pasifika theatre often tells stories of the Samoan diaspora, dramatising the impact of migration on the family and other cultural institutions, critiquing the racism often directed at Pasifika migrants, and dealing with the doubleness of living simultaneously in competing cultural contexts. In his book *Pacific Performances* Christopher Balme argues that:

> The new Pacific theatre … is a theatre of remembering focused on rediscovering cultural roots in order to fashion new and sometimes multiple identities.\

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14 Pasifika is the Samoan translation of Pacific, increasingly used as a more acceptable term for identifying Pacific migrants than “Pacific Islander”, which has come to have derogatory implications. Although “Pacific” is originally a European word, the use of Pasifika reclaims and indigenizes the word.

15 Balme, p. 191.
A significant element of this “remembering” and “rediscovering cultural roots” is the integration of spirituality and aspects of religious ritual into the form and themes of Pasifika theatre.

There are at least thirteen different Pasifika languages and cultures in New Zealand, each with its own distinct performative and spiritual tradition, with Samoans the largest of these groups (nearly 50%)\(^\text{16}\). Samoa has been politically divided since 1899 into American Samoa (a territory of the USA) and Western Samoa, now the independent state of Samoa. Western Samoa was a German colony until 1914, when it was administered by New Zealand until independence was finally achieved in 1962. From the 1960s onwards there has been widespread migration from Samoa to New Zealand, Australia and the USA. In this paper I focus on the spiritual and religious dimensions of Samoan theatre in New Zealand, examining performative strategies that manifest the spiritual dimension onstage. I draw upon ideas outlined by Anita Hammer in her book *Between Play and Prayer*. Hammer defines spiritual performance as that “which takes place when humans perform in order to call into being a spiritual presence.”\(^\text{17}\) Samoan theatre in New Zealand is influenced both by pre-colonial spiritual epistemologies, and by Christian ritual practices. In Samoan plays, the spirit world co-exists with a playful sense of humour based in spiritual agency, reflecting what Hammer defines as “spiritual play.”\(^\text{18}\) Hammer argues that “the distance between prayer, a primary indicator of the serious life and play is, in fact, not so great as the notion of secularism in industrial societies has taught us.”\(^\text{19}\) Samoan theatre often uses playful performative strategies to deal with serious issues, blending the spiritual and political in innovative ways. Hammer suggests that: “Dramaturgies that involve spiritual reference demand attention to processes of communication that transgress the boundaries between aesthetics and the spiritual.”\(^\text{20}\)

In Samoan theatre, aesthetics and the spiritual dimension are often intertwined, breaking down cultural and performative boundaries.

**ATUA AND ‘AITU (GODS AND SPIRITS)**

The New Zealand national museum Te Papa Tongarewa contains many examples of representations of pre-Christian Polynesian deities carved from wood or stone. In the nineteenth century these were denounced as “idols” by missionaries and often destroyed.\(^\text{21}\) In pre-Christian Samoa a variety of gods were worshipped, presided over by Tagaloa, the creator of the universe. This polytheistic world-view is reflected in the opening scene of Albert Wendt’s play *The Songmaker’s Chair* (2004) where the main character Peseola channels Tagaloa, singing his creation story, and naming the primary *atua* (gods).\(^\text{22}\) Although the play is a family drama set in contemporary New Zealand, this recitation gives an indigenous Pasifika spiritual framework for the


\(^{17}\) Hammer p. 26.

\(^{18}\) Ibid., p. 28.

\(^{19}\) Ibid., p. 26.

\(^{20}\) Ibid., p. 28.

\(^{21}\) See *Icons from Te Papa: Pacific*, p. 21.

\(^{22}\) Wendt, p. 7-8.
performance, enhancing the sense of the migrant Peseola clan’s origins in the ancient cultures of the Samoan Islands.

Alongside the main gods, there were also *aitu* (spirits), who were lesser deities and who may be the spirits of deceased humans. Hamilton notes that “*Atua* may have been somewhat remote from the general affairs of humans, but *aitu* were certainly greatly involved in them and needed to be invoked, placated or contacted frequently.” As we shall see, *aitu* play a major role in Samoan theatre.

The first Christian missionary John Williams of the London Missionary Society settled in Samoa in 1836, followed by French Marist priests who introduced Catholicism in 1845. Simpson argues that the enthusiastic adoption of Christianity was made easier because Samoans already believed in one supreme being, with the Christian God being seen as an equivalent of Tagaloa. This religious transition, however, did not necessarily lead to the exclusion of former beliefs. In the 1930s Keesing maintained that “Instead of accepting Christianity and allowing it to re-model their lives to its form, the Samoans have taken the religious practices taught to them and fitted them inside Samoan custom, making them a part of native culture.”

Hamilton observes that sometimes Catholicism adapted to Samoan customs, giving examples of how priests allowed traditional Samoan death rites to be carried out in the church, illustrating that religious adaptation and appropriation went in both directions. Sinavaiana argues that “while most Samoans identify themselves as Christian … there is still a widespread belief in spirit lore.” The Samoan Head of State Tui Atua Tupua Tamasese Ta’isi Efi has written about the “culture of whispers” surrounding pre-Christian Samoan religious beliefs, the legacy of the early Christian missionaries. Tui Atua argues that “The Samoan indigenous religion is not to be ashamed of, and especially not by Samoans. It is core to our identity as Samoans.”

While *The Songmaker’s Chair* opens with an evocation of the pre-Christian gods, other Samoan plays are framed with Christian hymns and prayers. For example, Dianna Fuemana’s *Falemalama* (2006), a moving account of the life of the playwright’s mother, begins and ends with Christian prayers in the Samoan language. Most of the play is performed in English, so the Samoan prayers create a spiritual framing for Falemalama’s story, underlining her strong faith which carries her through the struggles of her life as she moves from American Samoa to Niue to New Zealand. Fale’s mantra “*O le Atua na te silafia mea ‘uma*” (“God sees everything”) punctuates her story. Her belief in the love of God provides comfort throughout her life as she encounters illness, depression and domestic abuse. The spiritual framing of the narratives in *The Songmaker’s Chair* and *Falemalama* demonstrate the close connection between Samoan religious beliefs and Samoan theatrical storytelling.

23 Hamilton, p. 164.  
24 Simpson, p. 135.  
25 Hamilton, p. 163.  
26 Simpson, p. 135.  
27 Keesing quoted by Va’i, p. 78.  
28 Hamilton, p. 163.  
29 Sinavaiana, p. 194.  
In writing about pre-Christian Samoa, Tui Atua emphasizes how closely linked performance was to social rituals and religious belief. He explains how “the organs of the human body underline human divinity and spirituality” and how sex was regarded as a “sacred act.” Courtship rituals were enacted through dances such as the sa’e (naked dance) which required the dancers to display and flaunt their genitals, “not as instruments of sinful pleasure but as gifts from God Tagaloa.” Such public expressions of sexuality were banned by missionaries and are considered offensive to the “religious sensibilities of Christian Samoans.”

**Fale Aitu: The Spiritual Basis of Samoan Performance**

*Theatre is part of everyday life in Samoa and is very different from the formal form of theatre seen in the Western world. Fale aitu (satirical comedy) is one of Samoa’s oldest forms of performance art.*

Like the fertility dances of the pre-Christian era, Samoan comedy performance springs from a spiritual basis. The literal meaning of the pre-colonial form fale aitu, is “house of spirits” or “ghost house”. Caroline Sinavaiana writes about the spiritual aspects of fale aitu, in which authority figures are parodied through verbal and physical clowning. During fale aitu performances the lead clown is literally considered to transform into an aitu when in role:

It is the ghost who delivers the punch lines that carry the social or political criticism home to the particular authority figure being lampooned … This supernatural sanction, then, theoretically relieves the actors of responsibility for what is said and done in the comedy.

Ritual clowning performance is not unique to Samoa but is found widely throughout the Pacific Islands. In his book *Woven Gods* Vilsoni Hereniko divides Pacific clowning practices into secular (spontaneous and primarily for entertainment) and ritual clowning (containing sacred or symbolic significance). Within these broad parameters, he demonstrates a wide diversity of clowning practices, including a sketch in Tonga featuring “an over-sexed clergyman”, female clowns in Tokelau who “act as mediators between quarreling men by clowning to diffuse tensions”, and clowning as part of funeral rites in Papua New Guinea. Hereniko examines the phenomenon of female clowns in Rotuma who “deliberately provoke laughter in the midst of serious rituals” such as weddings. Hereniko argues that the female clown “embodies female and male, human and divine. She fuses ritual and play, stasis and movement, order and disorder – indeed the forces in society and nature that are

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32 Ibid., p. 28.
33 Ibid., p. 28-9.
34 Va’ai et al., p. 189.
35 Sinavaiana, p. 196.
36 Hereniko, p. 146.
37 Ibid., p. 148.
38 Ibid., p. 156.
39 Ibid., p. 126.
essential for life and its regeneration.” Unlike the Rotuman clowns, *fale aitu* is customarily an all-male performance form. Hereniko suggests that clowns were male in Samoa and Tahiti because their performances often took place within the context of “boating expeditions” and young men were “more mobile than mothers and wives, whose services were needed at home.”

Like most other forms of Pacific clowning, *fale aitu* has both a verbal and a physical dimension. Sinavaiana gives the example of a comedy sketch parodying a Western style medical operation where the mother of the patient was played by a male in a flowery dress who “spoke in high-pitched tones and whining cadences.” In place of an anaesthetic, the doctor stunned the patient with a large wooden mallet, opened him up with a carpenter’s saw, and extracted a long string of sausages (intestines) with large pliers. Sinavaiana notes that this very physical sketch uses “comic techniques of exaggeration, irony, and reversal” and “reflects a genuine anxiety that Samoans sometimes articulate about certain Western medical practices.” Other sketches are more subtle, but no less physical, such as those of the famous Samoan comedian Petelo, whose “ability to mimic a wide range of human and animal characters is so greatly admired by Samoan audiences …”. The embodied dimension of Pacific clowning in general is reinforced by Hereniko, who gives numerous examples including parodic mimicry, hip-wagging, exaggerated arm movements, flirting, wrestling, probing orifices in mock medical examinations, sexual innuendo and “simulation of bodily functions such as urination or defecation.” Comedy functions as a universal language in the Pacific with a multitude of functions, combining community celebration, political subversion and religious ritual.

The traditional *fale aitu* practices have been widely adapted in New Zealand Pasifika theatre, with several important theatre artists influenced by a workshop organised by Justine Simei-Barton of the Auckland company Pacific Theatre in 1996. Playwright Stephanie Johnson commented that the audience for a public presentation at the workshop were “captivated by the immediacy and energy of *fale aitu*” and predicted that “Pacific Theatre could find its niche in this new hybrid. … it is both subversive and peace-keeping.” Since then, the *fale aitu* influence has found its way into numerous Samoan plays, and the authority figures being parodied are often ministers of religion.

*Fale Aitu in Action: Romeo and Tusi*

In Oscar Kightley and Erolia Ifopo’s *Romeo and Tusi* (1997) a Samoan girl, Tusi, falls in love with a Māori boy Anaru when they are playing Romeo and Juliet in a school production. As in Shakespeare’s play, the barrier to the happiness of the young lovers is their warring parents. Therefore, much of the *fale aitu* style critique is

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40 Ibid., p. 133.
41 Ibid., p. 132-33.
42 Sinavaiana, p. 199.
43 Ibid., p. 199-200.
44 Ibid., p. 200.
46 Hereniko, pp. 143-66.
47 Johnson, n.p.
directed at the prejudice of the Samoan and Māori mothers which prevents their children from developing their relationship. The other major *fale aitu* influence is the representation of religious authority, in the form of the local minister. Whereas in Shakespeare’s play Friar Laurence is a sympathetic character who supports the young lovers in opposition to their controlling families, the Minister in *Romeo and Tusi* is thoroughly corrupt, using his privileged position in the community to line his own pockets. He constantly makes comic verbal slip-ups revealing that he is siphoning off church funds for his own benefit. In an early scene he greets the young protagonists as he runs a *Housie* game at the church:

MINISTER: Tusi, Anaru it’s good to see you young people here supporting the church and helping our fund raiser for my new BMW, I mean our new church building.\(^{48}\)

The Minister’s fraudulent activities are underlined by his apparent lack of knowledge of Biblical texts. He improvises to give the impression of his spiritual authority:

MINISTER: When I find myself in times of trouble Mother Mary comes to me speaking words of wisdom, let it be let it be.\(^{50}\)

The minister’s recourse to Beatles lyrics in lieu of liturgical knowledge comically represents him as a con-man rather than a spiritual guide. His generic character name adds to the impression that the target of the satire is ministers of religion in general, pointing to a broader critique of Pacific churches. Va’ai notes that:

> There is enormous social pressure to contribute financially to the church. Samoans often struggle to balance family needs with their duties to support their churches.\(^{51}\)

The pressures exerted by Samoan churches on their congregations in New Zealand has attracted media attention, such as a front page story in a Wellington newspaper about the tithing practices of the Samoan Congregational Church:

Reverend Popo Su’a owns four houses, lives rent free and does not pay power or phone bills. Yet just weeks before Christmas his Porirua parishioners were asked to give him $30,000 - $500 each – for spending money on a holiday to Samoa. … the request … was causing problems for many families [who] had taken out loans to cover the amount. … they were “shamed” into giving as much as they could because the names and the amount donated were read out in church.\(^{52}\)

This story contributes to perceptions of Samoan ministers leading comfortable lifestyles at the expense of low income parishioners. These critiques have been transposed into aesthetic form, such as a painting by Samoan artist Andy Leleisi’uao

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48 *Housie* is a game similar to Bingo in which numbers are called out and contestants win prizes if their numbers match.
49 Kightley and Ifopo, p. 8.
50 Ibid., p. 33.
51 Va’ai, p. 92.
52 Tyler, p. 1.
entitled ‘Honest to God’ (1998). This depicts a group of grotesque Polynesian pastors in sunglasses and black cassocks against a red background, with the inscription “Samoan Born Ministers Are Wankers.” 53 Two of the ministers appear to be strangling parishioners dressed in white.

The minister in Romeo and Tusi is a similarly critical portrait of corrupt authority in the form of organised religion. As in Romeo and Juliet, the young lovers go to the minister for advice, but he only agrees to help them because Tusi bribes him with a donation for his Sky TV subscription. 54 The Minister cynically exploits the faith invested in him by his parishioners. Sinavaiana argues that fale aitu is an effective tool in questioning the power structures installed by colonial authority. She analyses a sketch by the respected Samoan comedian Petelo in which he parodies an elderly minister:

The figure being satirized here is that of the elder pastor, whose addled reading of the Scripture and nonsensical exhortations to his congregation make him a ludicrous figure of fun, rather than the august and honored personage of real life. 55

Petelo’s pastor is a close relative of Kightley’s minister, in that both deconstruct the religious power structures which are dominant in the lives and finances of so many Samoan families. Sinavaiana argues that such representations of religious figures highlight “the problem of power being abused when misappropriated from the bicultural confusion of colonialism.” 56 In fale aitu performance, through the supernatural agency of the spirit of the performer and the impact of public performance, the actor gains a power which neutralises or challenges the power that the minister holds in everyday life.

**THE IMPACT OF CHRISTIANITY ON PACIFIC CULTURES**

The overwhelming significance of Christian religion in Samoan culture is illustrated by its central place in every aspect of life, including government. As Va’ai has noted, the preamble to the Constitution of Western Samoa begins with the words, “In the Holy Name of God, the Almighty, the Everloving.” 57 Va’ai demonstrates the crucial social function played by Samoan churches in present-day diasporic communities in New Zealand, Australia and the USA:

These churches serve as centres of social and religious activity and sustain a form of collective identity away from Samoa. … the churches overseas have become pseudo-Samoan villages where the Samoan language is used for services and cultural practices are observed. 58

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53 See Stevenson p. 138 and 142.
54 Kightley and Ifopo, p. 53.
56 Sinavaiana, p. 204.
57 Va’ai, p. 77.
58 Ibid., p. 90-1.
Many New Zealand-based Samoan theatre-makers had their first experience of performing on White Sunday (*Lotu Tamaiti*), which occurs annually on the second Sunday in October. The literal translation of *Lotu Tamaiti* is ‘church service of children’, and children perform dramatic sketches, recitations, song and dance in church. Simpson notes that: “Childhood requires deferential humility and service to the older members of the ‘aiga [family]’”\(^{59}\), arguing that on White Sunday, this status is ceremonially reversed, as children “‘act out’ adult responsibilities and experience adult prestige.”\(^{60}\) For Simpson however, this temporary release of power from elders to children is not liberatory: “the status inversion serves only a temporary release, so that the society might reaffirm its structure in the morning.”\(^{61}\)

In discussing the place of children at the bottom of the Samoan social hierarchy, Simpson notes that “Behaviour straying from the child’s customary low status may result in corporal punishment, and any adult may use physical discipline when children fail to meet expectations.”\(^{62}\) Yet such demands of parents on their children to excel in White Sunday sketches appears to be effective in creating strong performances in the young actors. Simpson observes, “the children show an exceptional commitment and focus, especially considering their age. They speak loudly and articulately, rarely breaking serious expression.”\(^{63}\) This is the result of adult coaching and intensive rehearsal in preparation for White Sunday as parents require performance rigor and discipline from their children.

Simpson sees a strong connection between *fale aitu* and White Sunday, noting that both “provide a ceremonial safety valve”\(^{64}\) for the least powerful members of society. Simpson argues that:

> *Fale aitu* provides a release for the common people who, for a moment in time, may laugh and jest at the powers that dictate the circumstances of their lives. Similarly, on *Lotu a Tamaiti*, children receive momentary relief from the frustrations they experience in the lower class of society.\(^{65}\)

This notion of performance as a spiritually sanctioned release valve for social tensions continues in the secular aesthetic practice of Pasifika theatre in New Zealand, becoming more transgressive and critical of hierarchical power structures.

**WHITE SUNDAY ON STAGE: ANGELS**

The influence of Samoan churches on young people is central to *Angels* (2009) a play by Tanya Muagututi’a and Joy Vaele.\(^{66}\) *Angels* depicts the long-term friendship

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\(^{59}\) Simpson, p. 137.

\(^{60}\) Ibid., p. 134.

\(^{61}\) Ibid., p. 147.

\(^{62}\) Ibid., p. 137.

\(^{63}\) Ibid., p. 147.

\(^{64}\) Ibid., p. 147.

\(^{65}\) Ibid., p. 140.

\(^{66}\) *Angels* was originally co-produced by Pacific Underground and The Court Theatre (Christchurch) in 2009. It was revived in 2016, re-titled *Angels Re:Born* and produced by the Auckland Theatre Company as part of their Next Big Thing Youth Theatre Festival.
between four Samoan girls who meet at church when they perform the Biblical “Story of Ruth” for White Sunday. Later they form a soul and gospel band – The Angels - to play in church. This brings them into conflict with their Pastor, who like the Minister in Romeo and Tusi becomes a performed critique of the church’s patriarchal authority.

The White Sunday performance is a “play within a play” that illuminates the broader themes of the work. The girls perform the Biblical story of Naomi and Ruth from the Book of Ruth, in which Naomi and her husband Elimelech move from Israel to Moab (Ruth 1: 1-2), a clear parallel with the migration of Samoan families to New Zealand. The death of Naomi’s husband and sons suggests the hardships of the migrant experience while Naomi’s daughter-in-law Ruth’s decision to worship the God of the Israelites recalls the adoption of Christianity by the Samoan people. Furthermore, Naomi’s declaration of faithfulness to her mother-in-law Naomi when she decides to return to Israel with her (Ruth 1: 16-17) makes this a story of female solidarity which resonates with the long-running friendship of the girls.

The White Sunday performance ends with the girls performing a rock’n’roll version of the children’s Bible song “One, Two, Three, The Devil’s After Me”, seeding the group they will form a few years later. The band’s repertoire reflects the influence of White Sunday evening shows, performed by young adults. As Simpson observes “Some of the music [in the evening shows] is closely related to the music heard in evangelical churches in the US and invokes a modern R & B aesthetic.” In reviewing Angels Walker notes that the actors are all “consummate musicians”. Their soulful rendering of tunes such as African-American Lauryn Hill’s “His Eye is on the Sparrow” enhances the performative energy of the play, like the evangelical music in Samoan churches, fuelling the spiritual dimension of the performance.

One of the girls, Sing, says, “I wish we could do White Sunday forever” Eventually, however, she has to choose between religion and a musical career. After the Pastor discovers the Angels singing in a nightclub, Sing is badly beaten by her father as a punishment and decides to re-dedicate her life to God. The consequences of Sing’s decision are revealed in a farewell scene between she and Stevie, who moves to Australia to become a professional musician:

Sing: I know you’re disappointed.

Stevie: Music’s my life, just as God is yours.

Sing: Yes, but he could be your life too.

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67 White Sunday also features in Poly-zygotic (2009), a play devised by Tupe Lualua, Taofi Mose-Tuiloma and Asalemo Tofete, who play Samoan triplets determined to be the winners at the annual church performance. Their high-energy comedy draws on Pacific clowning traditions, highlighting the competitiveness of White Sunday as the siblings assess their rivals, disagree over the style of their show and dream of being famous. Poly-zygotic premiered in the New Zealand Fringe Festival where it won a Pick of the Fringe award.

68 Ibid., p. 144.

69 Muagututia and Vaele, p. 36.
Stevie: I’ve still got him in my life. I just don’t agree with some of the stuff he asks of us. Anyway I always end up backsliding.

Sing: Jesus died for our sins, so we could be forgiven. The one that will forgive will have Jesus in her life.

Stevie: I can forgive, I just can’t forget. We were really good. I’ll never forget that.\textsuperscript{70}

This scene demonstrates the competing pressures of religion and performance. For Sing, a full commitment to her spiritual beliefs conflicts with the pleasures of performing. Stevie regrets that the potential of the band will never be realised due to Sing’s decision to leave. In the conflict between Sing and Stevie, the play stages an argument that a performing arts career is not compatible with a spiritual commitment.

In Angels, Sing positively represents the continuity of religious belief in a younger generation of Samoans even as the play acknowledges the hierarchical and gender implication of the church’s power. Stevie represents the competing urge to break away, to forge an independent identity and to pursue performance for its aesthetic and secular value rather than as an expression of religious belief.

\textbf{FAITH AND POSSESSION: THE CONFLICT BETWEEN CHRISTIANITY AND INDIGENOUS EPistemOLOGIES IN \textit{THINK OF A GARDEN}}

In contrast to the focus on Samoan Christian identity in New Zealand in Angels, John Kneubuhl’s \textit{Think of a Garden} (1992) dramatises the complex relationships between Christian and pre-Christian beliefs in Samoa itself. Born in American Samoa, Kneubuhl (1920-1992) trained as a scriptwriter in the USA and worked for many years in Hollywood. \textit{Think of a Garden} was first performed in Samoa in 1992,\textsuperscript{71} and subsequent productions of the play in Auckland (1993) and Wellington (1995) were highly influential in the development of New Zealand’s Pasifika theatre.

\textit{Think of a Garden} is an autobiographical work reflecting Kneubuhl’s upbringing in a mixed-race family in Samoa in the 1920s. Kneubuhl is represented in the play by two actors, a nine-year old boy (David) and his adult persona, identified as “The Writer”. The Writer acts as a narrator while the story unfolds. David has an American father, Frank, and an \textit{afakasi} (mixed-race) mother, Lu’isa, the granddaughter of an English missionary and a chiefly Samoan woman. The fictional story interconnects with the real events of Samoan history, specifically the death of Tupua Tamasese Leolofi III, the leader of the Mau independence movement, who was shot and killed by New Zealand police in 1929 during a peaceful protest. This traumatic event leads to the breakdown of the family, with David being sent off to school in New Zealand while his father and uncle fruitlessly attempt to seek justice for Tamasese’s death (Samoan independence was finally achieved in 1962).

\textsuperscript{70} Ibid., p. 63.
\textsuperscript{71} Johnson, J.P., p. 258.
The political themes of *Think of a Garden* have been thoroughly analysed elsewhere, so in this paper I concentrate on the spiritual dimensions of the play. Both Lu’isa and David represent an inner conflict between indigenous and Christian beliefs. Lu’isa staunchly clings to her Christian beliefs, yet when she learns of Tamasese’s death she attempts to express her grief by slashing her face with a broken bottle, a pre-Christian practice regarded as “the ultimate gift of love.” In many ways she reflects Tui Atua’s observation that Christian Samoans refuse “to entertain the thought that in their ancient religious beliefs and practices maybe our forebears had something useful and profound for our modern religious lives.” Tensions between Lu’isa and David’s Catholic teacher Brother Patrick results in Lu’isa withdrawing David from the Marist school to have private tuition with a protestant minister. Lu’isa claims spiritual authority over Patrick, reminding him that she is a descendant of Christian missionaries who “virtually Christianized the South Seas.” She dismisses the Catholic “obsession with Satan and possession and speaking with Saints! It’s medieval!” The conflict between Catholic and Protestant values reflects Va’ai’s observation: “When European missionaries first introduced Christianity to Samoa, the divisions and sectarian rivalries from Europe came with them.”

Early in the play, David is presented by Brother Patrick as a diligent Christian child, having translated the nativity story into Latin. As the narrative progresses, however, he develops a relationship with a spirit named Veni, the ghost of a deceased villager. David becomes “possessed” by this relationship with the spirit world, as described by Lilo: “His eyes rolled back in his head, his body twitched, out of control, and he whimpered – like a little animal.” Soon after, he appears naked but for a tapa cloth lavalava and has attempted to paint his skin brown. Thus the play creates a portrait of spiritual confusion in an *afakasi* child. Before David leaves to go to boarding school in New Zealand, he is left alone to say goodbye to Veni. But the ghost does not appear, leaving the boy distraught. His connection with his Samoan spirits seems to be lost, and as he leaves his home, the audience hears a Samoan hymn, reinforcing the sense that the Christian world-view now dominates David’s world.

The *afakasi* characters David and Lu’isa in *Think of a Garden* powerfully evoke the spiritual contradictions in a colonised people. The deep sense of unease in Veni’s possession of David parallels the political unease in the play surrounding the death of Tamasese and the struggle for independence.

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72 See Johnson, Balme.
73 Kneubuhl, p. 47.
75 Kneubuhl, p. 62.
76 Ibid., p. 67.
77 Va’ai, p. 78.
78 Kneubuhl, p. 28.
79 Ibid., p. 68.
80 Ibid., p. 79.
CONCLUSION

Samoan theatre has become a unique hybrid of Western theatrical conventions and Pasifika performative traditions, reflecting the blending of ancient spiritual beliefs and Christian doctrine in Samoan religion. It calls upon the ancient practices of ritual comedy from throughout the Pacific, re-purposing their subversive and celebratory functions for the postcolonial era. Aesthetic practices are inflected with the spirits of *fale aitu* and the performance disciplines of White Sunday. The portrait of a corrupt minister in *Romeo and Tusi* shows the satirical function of *fale aitu* remains potent and relevant in New Zealand, yet the pastor in *Angels* wields his patriarchal power to cut short the promising career of a girl band, whose very existence is due to the church’s encouragement of performance skills and discipline. While *Angels* stages the conflict between Christian religious values and artistic expression, *Think of a Garden* invokes the spiritual and corporeal confusion of Lu’isa and David in a psychological battle to reconcile the conflicting forces of a polytheistic culture with the demands of a Christian missionary culture. The *fale aitu* principle that actors take on the status of spirits or ghosts in performance, gives them a degree of power that counteracts other powerful forces in the hierarchical Samoan culture. This confluence of spiritual power with performance is part of the appeal of Pasifika theatre in an increasingly secular New Zealand. *Angels* dramatises the real difficulties that young Samoan artists have faced in asserting their independence of repressive religious doctrines, yet it is this very struggle that gives the plays such emotional force, even when they are presented as broadly comic parody. This combination of spiritual agency and satirical humour recalls Anita Hammer’s point that in many non-Western societies “play and prayer belong together.”81 (37). The distinctive voices of Pasifika theatre artists are arguably “possessed” by the spirit of their *aitu*, for whom there was no separation between spirituality and performance.

81 Hammer, p. 37.
REFERENCE LIST


KINBAKU: THE LIMINAL AND THE LIMINOID IN RITUAL PERFORMANCE

Heather Pennington

Abstract

Kinbaku, also known as Japanese rope bondage, has grown in popularity in recent years yet remains marginalized due to its associations with BDSM. Therefore, outside of its own community, it is a scarcely studied form of performance. Perhaps due to this lack of scholarship, and in spite of its popularity, kinbaku’s legacy remains vague. Most practitioners agree kinbaku arose from Japanese ritual practices, yet this leaves much to explore. After an introduction to kinbaku, this article will examine historical and contemporary Japanese ritual traditions in order to contextualize the practice. Next, analyzing the art of kinbaku via the concepts of the liminal and the liminoid, the argument will be made that kinbaku practices embody ritual performance. By locating the practices via a set of Japanese cultural traditions, this study ultimately argues against a binary, pathologizing reading of kinbaku, and contributes to validating future academic research centered around kink practices.

Keywords: Kinbaku; Kink; Liminal; Liminoid; Ritual Performance

A model hangs, suspended in mid-air by sturdy but delicate ropes. A rigger stands to one side, proudly presenting the scene. An avid audience admires the rigger’s rope work and knots as well as the shape and position of the model’s body. This is tsuri kinbaku, or suspended rope bondage, one in a group of Japanese rope bondage practices known as kinbaku.82 The rise of the internet coincided with a growing interest in this practice, and today technique books and blogs teach would-be practitioners ‘the ropes’ while venues from clubs to art galleries83 showcase kinbaku performance and photography (Midori, 2001: p. 3). Though often occurring within the context of BDSM activities (bondage, discipline, dominance, submission, sadism and/or masochism), kinbaku is not inherently concerned with masochism or sadism, the desires to experience or cause pain for sexual pleasure. Thus rather than the formulation SM or S & M, the term kink will be used as the umbrella term to describe the set of activities amongst which kinbaku can be located.84 The titles model and

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82 Within the kink community, both shibari and kinbaku describe Japanese rope bondage. The distinction is that while shibari means ‘to tie’, kinbaku means ‘to bind’ according to more traditional Japanese forms, thus carrying stronger aesthetic appeal (Master K, 2008: p. 6). As tradition heavily informs this investigation, the word kinbaku will be used.

83 Such as the “Art of Contemporary Shibari” (2012) at Mother Dog Studios in Austin, Texas, or various shows at the Concorde Art Gallery in Paris (2013, 2014, 2016).

84 Thanks here owed to kink scholar Tristan Taormino for an encompassing definition of kink as “an intimate experience, an exchange of power between people that can be physical, erotic, sexual, psychological, spiritual, or, most often, some combination” and “an all-encompassing term to describe
**rigger** will denote those who are tied and those who tie within a **scene**. ‘Scene’ is a general designation meaning any set of kink activities carried out between two or more people. A scene can be public (taking place at a club or party) or private (typically carried out within the home, a hotel room, or other similar venue without an audience). Participation in scenes, and in the broader community of people who practice kink, is governed by rules and collective values. These are best outlined by two acronyms: SSC and RACK. SSC stands for Safe, Sane, and Consensual, while RACK means Risk Aware Consensual Kink. Both acronyms emphasize consent, which has become a core value within kink play in the postmodern era. When considering contemporary kinbaku, which at its most basic is one person taking power from another by immobilizing them, it is important to remember that these actions are consensual.

The practice of kinbaku can be characterized both as performance and ritual. It has elements of standard theatre, such as an audience, repeatable sequences of behavior executed in particular ways to achieve particular results, technique, dramatic showiness, and denouement. Though these are not necessary for a designation as ‘performance’, kinbaku’s theatrical elements help it feel performative. Furthermore, kinbaku has been classed as ritual. As an activity which occurs within the kink community, kinbaku falls under what author and sex educator Barbara Carellas refers to as “BDSM rituals” (2012: p. 140); as a form of sexualized binding, kinbaku relates to ritual elements of Japanese culture to be detailed shortly. Finally, anthropologist Edward Schieffelen posits “ritual performance” as a classification, conjoining the two categories (1998: p. 205).

Though its roots stretch back much farther, Japanese erotic rope bondage as it is known today began to become popular in the 1920s, when a series of photographs of tied women, taken by artist Ito Seiyu, entered circulation (Midori, 2001: p. 16). It seems kinbaku’s popularity declined preceding and during World War II (ibid.). After the war had ended in 1945, the Allies abolished censorship. When Japanese kink magazine Kitan Club published the illustration “Ten Naked Tied Women” that year, kinbaku began to experience a resurgence (Merzbow, 1996). Around this time, bondage performance clubs appeared in Tokyo, furthering an appreciation for the art (Midori, 2001: p. 16). Though the internet has allowed kinbaku techniques and images to proliferate widely beyond Japan, certain traditions are still prevalent. For the people, practices, and communities that move beyond traditional ideas about sex to explore the edges of eroticism.” (2012).

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85 SSC was coined in 1983 (Stein, 2002) and RACK in 1999 (Switch, unknown date).
86 The APA has declared the singular “they/them/their” appropriate, and in agreement with BDSM educator Mollena Williams, this author will “deliberately use the plural pronouns they, them, and their to refer to singular persons of any gender,” as “the traditional forms reflect a gender binary to which I do not subscribe.” (Williams, 2012: p. 263).
87 Richard Schechner’s argument that a practice need not be classed as orthodox theatre to be studied as performance was foundational to his creation of the field of performance studies (2002: p. 1). However, though his work arguably facilitated the present discussion, his point of departure classes artistic performance as distinct from cultural performance (which includes ritual). A Turnerian reading allows for a richer interpretation of kinbaku within a performance framework that includes both art and ritual and thus will be the focus here.
88 The present work is concerned with kinbaku that originated in Japan and utilizes methods handed down from Japanese master teachers and yet, in spreading out over the globe, evolves and changes to reflect best practices, cultural attitudes, and performers’ preferences. Cities of the author’s research include Los Angeles, London, Tokyo, Hong Kong, Singapore, and Taipei.
example at present, a majority of riggers are male and models are female.\textsuperscript{89} This may be due to kinbaku’s evolution from a style of military restraint primarily practiced by men, known as hojojutsu. Hojojutsu’s origins are as murky as those of kinbaku,\textsuperscript{90} yet investigating the evolution of Japanese ritual helps contextualize both.

\textbf{\textsc{Japan, Ritual, and Rope}}

Shintoism, a native religious practice dating back to at least 300 BC, contains some of the earliest recognized forms of Japanese ritual in washing, offering, and burial customs (Ishida, 1974: p. 91). Though rice farming had been introduced more than a millennium earlier, rice rituals became central to Japanese farming society in the mid to late Heian period (794-1185 AD), around 1000 AD (ibid.: p. 14). Together, these agrarian and religious ritual practices formed the basis for those ritual elements which persist in Japan today. In fact, a search for recent publications on ritual aspects of Japanese culture reveals ritual persists in nearly every area of life: food preparation and presentation, aging, fertility, business, gift giving, speech, dance, dwelling, sex, and death.\textsuperscript{91}

The tea ceremony, flower arranging, and shiatsu massage\textsuperscript{92} are visible practices in modern Japanese culture containing significant elements of ritual – and connecting with kinbaku. Master K, kinbaku practitioner and author of the foremost account of the practice’s development in English, notes the Japanese ability to “ritualize and beautify daily objects and activities, from the tea ceremony to flower arranging” (2008: p. 14). In fact, the tea ceremony (chanoyu) is known as the “ritual drinking of tea” (Sato, 2008: p. 23). Teahouses are often decorated with floral art, and flower arranging (ikebana) is part of the Japanese appreciation for the seasonal, fleeting beauty of nature. Ikebana links with ritual via its presence in the ritual tea ceremony, and its associations with Buddhism. Buddhist ceremonial flower offerings (kuge) took on significance during the Heian period (Kawase & Miyake, 1999: p. 98), when plants came to have ritual functions, banishing evil or representing coming of age (Shirane, 2012: pp. 102, 103). Interestingly, “ikebana – like waka (classical poetry) […] and chanoyu – is best defined as a performance art; once the occasion is over, the flower arrangement has fulfilled its primary function” (ibid.: p. 103). This is also true of ritualized binding in a kinbaku performance – the bondage is done specifically for and in its performed context, and has fulfilled its primary function when the performance ends. Another contemporary Japanese ritual form is shiatsu, a medicinal bodywork practice (Beresford-Cooke, 2011: p. 5). Though founded circa 1925, the practice draws upon ritual techniques from ancient Chinese medicine, combining pressure, massage, and stretches which may promote relaxation and stress release.

\textsuperscript{89} The present work does not focus on the problematic gender politics of these practices.
\textsuperscript{90} A general lack of scholarship on kinbaku performance practices, and a specific lack of published materials in English, prohibits extensive textual research. Consequently, alternative sources have been used as data points: published resources on other kink practices, kinbaku technique books, and various aspects of Japanese culture; the author’s ongoing field research, commenced in 2012.
\textsuperscript{91} While some of these accounts are written by outsiders (\textit{gaijin}) who promulgate an orientalist reading of Japanese culture as ritualistic, this is not the case for every article. This author hopes to avoid such a reading of kinbaku practices.
\textsuperscript{92} More connections between kinbaku and contemporary Japanese ritual practices can be drawn, via the dramatic nature of poetry recitation, ceremonial aging rites, and the performativity of power relations in formal dance. See Shirane (2012); Traphagan (2006); Averbuch (1996).
Shiatsu and kinbaku can be corporeally similar, almost as if a tied model is experiencing an intense massage:

The pressure of ropes on skin and body, when bound, produces an effect similar to that of a vigorous embrace, thus promoting a strong release of endorphins, and producing a great sense of relaxation [and] tension release. (Kinbaku Luxuria, 2012).

In addition to shiatsu, the tea ceremony, and flower arranging, present-day Japanese culture also evinces a strong link with ritual tradition via its connection with rope and tying objects. This connection finds its antecedents in Japanese antiquity (Midori, 2001: p. 13). Because historically the island was resource-scarce, wood and metal crafts were rare but plant fibers were plentiful and rope crafts became central. The Jōmon (‘straw rope pattern’) period, roughly 10,000 – 300 BC, was named after the distinctive rope-patterned pottery of its people (ibid.). From the Jōmon period to the present, rope and knots have been used in religious ceremonies for Buddhism and Shintoism; in wrapping and decorating packages (juroshiki); in attire such as the kimono, tied closed with a strip of cloth (obi); and in battle armor, tied to the body. With the advent of hojojutsu, the martial and law enforcement technique of detaining a captured opponent with rope which likely dates to the Sengoku period (beginning in 1467), rope and ties became symbols of power (ibid.: p. 14; Master K, 2008: p. 12). Though present scholarship in this area remains vague, the argument has been made that once rope and ties became symbols of prisonership, similar to handcuffs and stocks used in other forms of bondage, this translated into sexual play (Bacarr, 2004: p. 185). Indeed, Itoh Seiyu brought kinbaku into initial popularity after learning hojojutsu from an aged practitioner and then using it to bind his models (Master K, 2008: p. 65). Stepping into the sexualized, temporary roles of captive and captor may help bring kinbaku performers into a ritual space called the liminal.

** Kinbaku and Ritual Liminality **

In 1967, Victor Turner published *Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in Rites de Passage*. This essay describes the rituals of the Ndembu people of Zambia by drawing upon Arnold van Gennep’s 1909 definition of the liminal, a space created during ritual rites of passage. Turner defines rituals as sets of “prescribed formal behavior for [certain] occasions”, through which participants enter the liminal, a state of being “neither here nor there” but rather “betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed” by societal structures (2008: pp. 19, 95). Because ritual participants experience the liminal as a state of great intensity, the experience must necessarily be short-lived.

Applying Turner’s concept of the liminal “betwixt and between” to kinbaku enables framing the practice as ritual. Certainly, kink activities such as kinbaku performance fit within Turner’s conception of liminal sites as loci of great intensity, having been termed “crucible[s] for creativity, vulnerability, perseverance, control, catharsis, and connection” (Taormino, 2012: p. xv). Kink educators and practitioners widely agree, as Taormino states in *The Ultimate Guide to Kink*, that kink can provide opportunities for “self-reflection, challenge, and personal growth”, just as rites of passage do (2012: p. xv; Turner, 1989: p. 102). Kink is sometimes considered by its practitioners to be
Further allaying the liminal with specific conditions that arise during kinbaku is the transient relationship of those sharing in the experience. Ritual participants can be divided into two groups: the masters, or teachers, and those experiencing the rite of passage upon their bodies, or the neophytes. Similarly, performers in kinbaku may begin as autonomous, equal individuals, but will quickly adopt the roles of rigger and model. In these roles, as “between instructors and neophytes[.] there is often complete authority and complete submission” (Turner, 1989: p. 99). This is necessary for the ritual to succeed. Yet, though “complete obedience” (ibid.: p. 100) characterizes the neophyte, Turner also writes of ritual’s ability to invert societal hierarchies in an almost carnivalesque manner: “in liminality, the underlying comes uppermost” (2008: p. 102). In kinbaku, because the model dictates the limits of the scene, many argue they hold more power.95

Though this may be accurate, in kinbaku performance the model’s vulnerability is often stressed through various activities such as the removal of clothing before or during a scene, tightening ropes in strategic places, tickling, or applying hot wax, a blindfold, or a gag. These stressors help reinforce the control the rigger appears to have, often bringing the model to a place called subspace – the mental state of a submissive who has surrendered will, control, and power to another. During the liminal period, vulnerable neophytes too receive symbolic stress (ibid.: p. 108), and demonstrate “passivity” and “malleability, which is increased by submission to ordeal” (Turner, 1989: p. 101). These “ordeals and tests” may amount to “torture”, but are sustained out of obedience to authority during the liminal state (ibid.: p. 100). Submissive subspace may help models relax in order to cope with the physical stress and sensual intensity of their situations: those in subspace report a feeling of surrendering into the activity in which they are participating, frequently describing meditative feelings of calm (Midori, 2012: p. 117). Reached specifically through the particular set of ritualized actions performed in kinbaku (or other kink), it appears that subspace is liminal space.

**DISCONTINUITIES AND THE LIMINOID**

Importantly, there are several elements within Turner’s concept of the liminal that do not correspond with kinbaku. First and foremost, kinbaku does not use the liminal as a means to an end. Unlike rites of passage, creating and employing liminality is not kinbaku’s function, but rather a quality of its practice. Models might wish to enter

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93 Williams also uses the terminology of liberation freely (2012).
94 See Mikhail Bakhtin’s 1984 *Rabelais and His World*.
95 Though the topic of who holds greater power in a scene is the subject of much debate in the kink community.
subspace, riggers might like to see this happen, but the route to it is often unpredictable and thus it is rarely the ultimate goal of kinky play. Next, though it may be a spiritual experience, kinbaku is not a religious practice, whereas for Turner, ritual and liminality are associated with religious behavior (1989: p. 95). Nor is kinbaku a way of refashioning the identities of members of society, a way for practitioners to be “ground down” so they may assume a new social role after rites of passage (Turner, 2008: p. 95). Furthermore, in their ‘ground down’ condition, individuals in the liminal state are invisible because society does not expect to see people passing from one life phase to another (ibid.). In performing kinbaku, subjects make themselves visible (even if they feel a dissolution of self during performance). Perhaps subjects remain invisible to a larger society, as their practice is still taboo, yet within their own community they are very much visible.96

These discontinuities between Turner’s liminal and the liminal of performative kinbaku may be reconciled in the liminoid, an idea on which Turner focused later in his career, which “resembles without being identical with ‘liminal’” (1974: p. 64). Where the liminal underlines the importance of custom, tradition, and normative behavior, breaking rules only within a regulated context and later restoring order to reinforce social standards, the liminoid provides the opportunity to subvert such norms. Thus, performance can be read as a liminoid genre if used to liberate its practitioners from the axioms of industrialized societies so they may explore subversive alternatives, such as kink (Turner, 1975: p. 14). Additionally, Turner defines liminoid as a transitional state only arising within complex, post-industrial revolution societies, which divide between work and leisure (which includes play) (ibid.: pp. 63-64). With “the absence of obligation”, leisure activities have “a pleasurable quality”, central to the notion of play and found within the liminoid but absent from the ritual liminal (ibid.: pp. 16, 65).

As societies began to divide work from play, there was “a shift from the meaning of sex as procreative ‘work,’ (a persistent meaning in tribal and feudal societies) to the division of sexual activity into ‘play’ or ‘foreplay,’ and the ‘serious’ business or ‘work’ of begetting progeny” (Turner, 1974: p. 66). ‘Work’ can create liminal states, but only play can create the liminoid. Setting aside the troublingly heteronormative implications of the nature of ‘work’ within this discourse, Turner’s designation of sexual play as a liminoid activity is useful. Though kink performers could be said to engage in their sexual play for financial gain, which might re-classify it as work, many perform for free, or do not earn their living from performance, re-demarcating their kink activities as play. Audiences do often pay to see these performances, yet this further connects to the liminoid, which “often is a commodity, which one selects and pays for” (ibid.: p. 86). By these criteria, kink such as kinbaku, a playful sexualized activity, can be classed as liminoid.

There are several other reasons to delineate kinbaku performances as liminoid. First, liminoid phenomena are “practiced by and for particular groups” – in this case, predominantly the kink community and consumers of pornography (ibid.). Next, “liminoid phenomena develop apart from the central economic and political processes, along the margins” and “tend to be more idiosyncratic or quirky” (Turner, 1974: p.

96 The author’s own research (2016), indicates issues of visibility are an area for further study, as mainstreaming of this otherwise illicit practice increasingly puts kinky subcultures on display.
This is true of the development of kinbaku performance, still often considered taboo. Also, like kinbaku, liminoid forms “are plural, fragmentary, and experimental in character” (ibid.). As a practice, kinbaku evolves as riggers and models imagine new things to do with ropes. Additionally, the liminoid is often “generated by specific named individuals and in particular groups – ‘schools,’ circles, and coteries” such as in/famous kinbaku teachers and their students,⁹⁷ or kink communities in specific cities which have their own common and preferred methods of tying (ibid.). Furthermore, just as, for Turner, “each type of ritual” in Ndembu society has “its own combination of medicines’ and its own type of ‘ritual apparatus’” (Turner, 1989: p. 14), so kinbaku has its own specialized practices, its own rope patterns, knot work, suspension techniques, and extensive equipment. In order to create both a site for the use of the equipment which the liminoid often requires, and a private location which can effectively monetize entrance or membership to such a space to see or practice the liminoid, “there are permanent ‘liminoid’ settings and spaces” such as “bars, pubs, some cafes, social clubs, etc.” where kinbaku is practiced (Turner, 1974: p. 86). These are plausible reasons to class kinbaku performance as liminoid, though it should be noted that this reading owes much to Turner’s earlier concept of the liminal. Turner is careful to mention that both liminal and liminoid are ritual experiences. This continues to support a reading of kinbaku activities as ritual performance.

CONCLUSION

There is a practice which those in the kink community use to conclude a scene, called aftercare. To engage in aftercare means to exchange a hug, eat chocolate, cuddle, or do whatever activity helps players feel comfortable while bringing the emotional intensity of a scene to an end. Midori (2012) designates kink as “being in an altered state”, while aftercare is “what each participant needs to transition from [kink] play to everyday life.” (p. 92). Williams agrees: “playing can take you to new and exciting places. But afterward? You have to find a way back” (2012: p. 261-62). After the liminal state, there is a phase of re-entry. Like the liminal, the liminoid too must end, and one must find one’s way back. For kinbaku, aftercare is the way to return to normal life.

Unfortunately, the distance many perceive between ‘normal life’ and kink, including forms of consensual bondage such as kinbaku, has meant kinky activities are still widely considered sexual perversions, whether tolerated as a subculture in Japan or pathologized in much of the English speaking world.⁹⁸ Despite growing popularity and mainstream recognition, this delimitation has, until very recently, put these subjects beyond scholarship. At present, academic work on kinbaku is virtually nonexistent. While there is scholarship on SM/BDSM, it often involves binary discourses which seek to either condemn or condone kink as a practice. A non-binary investigation into kinbaku and kink as forms of performance should find a place within the ever-expanding fields of performance and cultural studies. In moving

⁹⁷ For example, ‘Master’ rope teachers Osada Steve and Yukimura Harkui have five authorized dojos to teach their styles globally, in Copenhagen, Melbourne, Tokyo, Vancouver, and Vienna.

⁹⁸ See the DSM-V, the 5th Edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders – used widely as a diagnostic tool – which classes sadism and masochism, as well as other kinky activities such as exhibitionism and general “non-normative sexual behavior” as “paraphilias” – grouping them with pedophilia and acts involving sexual violence against nonconsenting victims.
beyond kinbaku’s associations with pathologized, deviant sexuality, in tracing its ancient roots to rice rituals or military ceremony, in finding its modern context in ikebana or the Kitan Club, it becomes clear that kinbaku’s connections with ritual traditions inform a complex practice. Indeed, investigating the liminal/liminoid space of kinbaku should clarify that viewing this art form as simply about perverts tying people up for sex fails to recognize its depth.

GLOSSARY

*Chanoyu* 茶の湯
tea ceremony

*Furoshiki* 風呂敷
art of wrapping or decorating packages

*Gaijin* 外人
Outsider, foreigner

*Heian* (heian jidai) 平安時代
period of Japanese history spanning 794-1185 AD

*Hojojutsu* 捕縄術
style of military restraint utilizing ropes to restrain a captive

*Ikebana* 生け花
art of flower arranging

*Jōmon* (jōmon jidai) 縄文時代
‘Straw rope pattern’ period of Japanese history spanning roughly 10,000 – 300 BC

*Kimono* 着物, きもの
rope tied at the waist with a sash

*Kinbaku* 緊縛
literally meaning ‘to bind’; a word for rope bondage in accordance to traditional Japanese forms

*Kuge* 公家
Buddhist ceremonial flower offerings

*Obi* 帯, おび
sash used to tie a *kimono* or martial arts uniform

*Sengoku* (sengoku jidai) 戦国時代
period of Japanese history spanning 1467-1603 AD

*Shiatsu* 指圧, しじつ
massage or bodywork form

*Shibari* 縛り
literally meaning ‘to tie’; a word for rope bondage

*Tsuri kinbaku* 吊り縛り
suspended (吊り) rope bondage (緊縛)

*Waka* 和歌
classical poetry
REFERENCE LIST


Tongan Kava: Performance, Adaptation, and Identity in Diaspora

Arcia Tecun (Daniel Hernandez)

Abstract

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

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

Positionality and Methods

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

I have participated in faikava in Utah (U.S.A.) for over 13 years now, which is where I draw my auto-ethnography from. This includes reflecting on and revisiting personal
documentation such as journal writings, pictures, and the stories behind them. In addition, the ethnography portion includes 21 focused participant-observations during formal research in Utah. Having resided in the North Island of Aotearoa (New Zealand) now for two years respectively, I am also drawing from 30 formal observations in the span of my official research so far, and many more before and after. Additionally, while attending a Kava conference in Canberra, Australia in 2015 I participated in 4 Kava sessions there, and since 2012 have been in 16 such gatherings across the major island groups in the Kingdom of Tonga. Several of these sessions are repeat visits to faikava with certain hosts or at organized kalapu (kava club’s), each of which have been unique in their purpose for gathering, composition of attendees, focus of conversation, and song selection, among other things. The primary method of gathering ethnographic data has been talanoa in person, over food, or at faikava (Māhina, 2008b; Vaioleti, 2006; Fa’avae, Jones, & Manu’atu, 2016). Talanoa has been explained as a circular narrative style approach to dialogue, and as an appropriate research method with Pasifika people. Hūfanga (Dr. ‘Okusitino Māhina, personal communication) has also indicated that talanoa is a critical discussion in the context of knowledge production such as a research setting, but not exclusive to academic research. Drawing from decolonial research ethics and methods, the question of why am I doing this research and for whom are centred in my approach (Smith, 2012). This is one of the reasons I have not italicised Tongan words, because they are not foreign words but the norm, the centre. Additionally, I use the term Moana, which Māhina (2010) has explained to be a more appropriate term for the ocean, which is the Indigenous word for many in the sea of islands that transcend the parameters that have been used to divide regions in Oceania (Hau’ofa, 1993). Including my positionality briefly is to indicate my point of relation and introduction to Kava from where many of my relationships and participants for this research have sprung from. Although the participants are friends, mentors, and the like, I always provided a me’a ofa (gift) of some kind to individuals or to groups as a whole for sharing time and knowledge with me that was specifically for this research. My relationships do not end with this paper or my eventual thesis, but are ongoing. This is rooted in a common view of upholding relationships in both Mayan and Tongan worldviews, and I am responsible for maintaining these relationships in a good way, not only throughout this research but beyond it.

**Kava Tonga**

The origin of Kava is a supernatural one in Tonga, where it first grew miraculously in the tale of which I’ll give a brief introduction to here. It is important to note that there are several versions of the origin story of Kava in Tonga and I will just focus on some common elements (Biersack, 1991). A high chief (exact person varies in each narrative) arrived at an island where a father Fevanga, seeing this arrival anxiously prepared an umu (earth oven), while Fefafa his wife went to harvest kape (giant taro) to feed the honoured guest upon arrival (Shumway and Smith, 1999). They found him resting under the shade of the plant hoped to be harvested, and being unable to approach him because of his status and rank, they put their daughter in the umu as a sacrifice to offer him. When the high chief heard of such devotion he refused the gift and instructed them to leave it as her grave. Another version says he took off before the umu could be uncovered, and it eventually became her daughter’s grave, whose name was Kava’onau. Two plants eventually grew from her tomb, one being named...
after her, Kava, and the other was Tō (sugarcane). In the version where the high chief Lo'au was an attendant and heard of these miraculous new plants growing from the grave mound, he instructed her parents to take it to the Tu‘i Tonga (paramount chief of Tonga) as an offering, one sweet, one bitter, a balanced gift (Biersack, 1991; Wolfgramm and Shumway, 2001). Among other values these narratives teach are the importance of sacrifice, balance, and sacred responsibilities of reciprocity both in the offering by the people, and in the chiefly refusal to accept such a costly one (Biersack, 1991). Kava is the national drink of Tonga and remains a powerful icon of identity and cultural values in Tonga, and throughout the Moana (Aporosa, 2015; Shumway and Smith, 1999).

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

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

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

**KAVA ADAPTATIONS**

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

Faikava eva on the other hand has transferred in location as to who is the host, and considering Helu’s (1992) observations of it being more and more rare, I would argue it has adapted, but remains present. The presence of a tou’a fefine (woman kava preparer/server) has generally been rare in the circles I’ve attended, but knowledge of this role is well known, and is one of the more distinct elements of Tongan Kava gatherings. When I’ve attended multi-ethnic group settings of faikava that may still be predominantly Tongan influenced, but composed demographically of people from across the Moana ancestrally, the Tongan practice and reasons for having female tou’a’s is at times contested through humour and story by non-Tongans. There are some Tongans who believe Kava can be an aphrodisiac whereas some of the non-
Tongan’s who are also from the Moana have often contested that notion in multi-ethnic spaces, commenting that it is not the case, and if it is, it is only for Tongans, which is usually told through comedic means. Within the communities and specifically some religious denominations, the continued presence of a tou’a fefine at a kalapu is controversial, and some religious and community leaders have associated the practice with infidelity and marital discord. When Helu (1992) refers to faikava eva, it is single men who court the young woman, whereas in the kalapu, flirtation (e.g., courtship) can come from single and married men. There are some spouses who I’ve spoken to that have expressed their discontent with this and in some cases, such as one woman I spoke with in Tonga, ban their husband’s participation at a faikava if there is a tou’a fefine there (Fefine Tonga, personal communication). One participant said that the controversy has emerged because “we have removed the tou’a from her home where she is host, and brought her to the kalapu, in the realm of men” (Tangata Tonga Eiki, personal communication). A tou’a fefine in her own home being courted, differs from being outside of it as a guest or fulfilling a service (in many cases payment or cash gifts are given), the new environment reflecting the changing gender and power relations. Although this adaptation is controversial, Kava courtship remains intact in altered ways and settings. Faikava in its adaptations over time has now consolidated various diverse practices and uses into the kalapu and other Kava drinking sessions.

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

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

Kava fakasiasi (church/Sunday Kava) is still going strong today among church’s that practice it. Generally speaking, the various Methodist denominations and Catholics may integrate Kava into their leadership meetings and welcome of visitors. They may also allow the congregation to use church facilities to gather once or twice a week to faikava. In some of these congregation’s they may also sponsor a specifically youth Kava group as well that would meet on church premises. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons/LDS) doesn’t have an official ban on Kava although it can be controversial and there is a variety of perspectives for, against, and in between by leaders and members. I won’t delve into the details of fakasiasi at this time other than some of its integration into the kalapu and other non-church based faikava practice. One of the consistent practices across countries, clubs, and groups regardless of religious affiliation, belief, or participation level in any organized Christian religion is Sunday/Sabbath observance. I have observed as a general rule that Saturday midnight to Sunday midnight is a time to show reverence for the Sabbath. The type of conversation and music during a faikava in that time frame differs from outside of it.

Hiva Kakala, which has been explained to me as either songs of sweet fragrance or love songs, become songs about Jesus sung in the same musical style, or as rearrangements of hymns from one’s own denomination, or a mix of hymns from various sects (Kaeppler, 1994; Moyle, 1987). The conversations often shift to congregational community issues, theology, or religious doctrine. The varying degrees to which this is practiced depends on the group, but in my observations, were often more pronounced when elders or religious and community leaders are present. The symbolisms around Kava have taken on Christian meanings and/or are now used in various Christian contexts as mentioned above. Vaka’uta (1991) explains that the combination of Kava and sugarcane taken like Christ’s cross together are like the two elements of the Eucharist. This draws from the parallels between Christianity and Kava’onau being tied to the fruits of sacrifice. In one of the faikava’s I attended in Utah this topic came up; the attendants and hosts were Fijian or Tongan, and all of them were Mormon. They shared that if Jesus were to come to their home, the best way they could honour him would be to present Kava to him. Elements of Kava fakasiasi are generally part of the faikava and kalapu kava that I have witnessed.

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

BINDING AND IDENTITY

Kava is about bringing people together, and it is also about learning, and maintaining
a Tongan and Moana identity. I’ve noted several comments to support this concept
during my ethnographic participant-observation, and talanoa in faikava that took place
in homes and kalapu’s (usually in someone’s garage or basement). Robert Reeves
who identifies himself as hafkas (Half Caste - Tongan/European) stated that “Kava
brings people together” and explained that this is what Kava is about for him,
referring to the gathering of his family and close friends in the circles he is part of
(Robert Reeves, personal communication; Utah, U.S.A.). Another young Tongan (in
his 20s) stated that “It’s just part of who we are, you can’t separate Tongans from
Kava” (Tangata Tonga, personal communication; Aotearoa). Kis. B, a Tongan Hip-
Hop artist and producer explained that it doesn’t matter what your background is,
there’s lots of religions and ethnicities that can be represented in one Kava circle,
indicating that a diverse set of people can be unified through Kava (personal
communication; Utah, U.S.A.). The last comment I will share to make this point
emerged collectively in a co-constructed idea through talanoa in one gathering, but
thematically it also appeared in different words and expressions in each research site
that “Kava is like the ocean, it’s what connects us” (Tangata Moana, personal
communication; Utah, U.S.A.).

Place is a significant factor in many Indigenous identities, in fact that is how I am
defining Indigenous here, as the languages and cultures that emerged out of a
particular place and the people that belong to it. As Indigenous peoples, we face a
dilemma and conflict when removed from or separated from places (considering both
time and space) where our identities are tied to, through genealogy, knowledge, and
being. This phenomenon is confronted by more and more people finding themselves
in diasporic contexts whether by overt displacement or influenced by covert forces of
migration such as globalizing political economy. I am conceptualizing diasporic
context as a state of separation/scattering from, and/or being spread out from the
subsequent sites of cultural reinforcement to where Indigenous identities were created,
and the process of bridging or narrowing that distance. Cattermole (2009) speaking on
the Kava singing in Fiji explained that “The people are the lewe ni vanua (the flesh /
members of the land); the human manifestation of the physical environment. The land
belongs to the people, and the people belong to the land” (p.157). She goes on to
explain how particular styles of Kava singing in Fiji is part of constructing a sense of
who one is and where they belong, reinforcing kinship ties and homeland with songs
that etch in the meaning and value of place. This concept of connection/connecting to
the vanua (land, people, tradition, etc.) is fonua in Tongan. Fehoko (2014) titled his
master’s thesis with the saying pukepuke fonua, which he explained is an expression
often shared in reference to gathering around a Kava bowl to faikava. This saying
means to hold on tightly to the fonua, the land, its people, and their traditions.
While drinking Kava with Victor Narsimulu, a Rotuman who now resides and studies
in Utah, he mentioned as he went to stir the Kava before we all took another cup, that
it was the ocean. As he dipped in the ipu/bilo (Tongan-Sāmoan/iTaukei word for coconut shell cup used to drink Kava), the kava that had settled at the bottom of the wooden kumete/tano’a (Tongan word and more formal word for Kava bowl), it looked as the sand does when it is churning in the ocean current near the shore, being stirred into a homogenous consistency before being served out to drink. Kava is transportable fonua/vanua, and Moana peoples in diaspora are able to maintain Indigenous connections to their identities of the land and to the lands themselves whether they were born in ancestral places or not as they bring their land with them and continue to ingest it, despite their distance from place (Aporosa, 2014; Aporosa, 2015).

Eric B. Shumway, who carries the title faivaola, explained in the documentary film he directed about Kava that similar to fai kava, when a Tongan person puts on their ta’ovala (waist mat) and ties it onto them, it is also called pukepuke fonua (to hold on tightly to the land/fonua) (Shumway and Smith, 1999). It is a metonymical and metaphorical binding of place and land to oneself, which is expressed through different aspects of Tongan identity. These aspects of Tongan identity are exhibited through wearing Indigenous regalia such as the ta’ovala that is tied on with the kafa (coconut sennit rope) and/or through participation in Kava sessions. There has been scrutiny however within the communities about diasporic practices of faikava and from some religious oversights as well. There is a criticism by some that new materials, or regular kava use often termed as recreational are un-traditional, negative, and perceived to dominate Kava practices. For many in diaspora I have observed, although the material of the vessels used to prepare, serve, and drink Kava may change from a coconut shell to a plastic bowl or cup, the purposes of binding people together through the land has been consistent. In the various groups, I have visited or participate with, when there is a community member in need, attendees donate whatever funds they have or whatever support they can to lift up that person. In every setting I was in, some form of sharing or gifting took place, whether it was shared chasers to eat during the faikava such as fruit or lollies that represents the Tō (sugarcane) in the origin story of Kava, or money pooled together to help out someone in the group. There is the direct connection to land by ingesting Kava, and also extensions of that connection to the land’s people, through the behaviours reproduced in faikava of establishing and maintaining relationships, through gifting and sharing. This is a reflection of a paramount aspect of Tongan culture and identity, expressed in the value of Tauhi Vā, an art of social spatial relationality, which means to nurture the space between, that is to say one’s relations, which is a fundamental part of faikava (Ka’ili, 2005).

**PERFORMANCE AND TONGAN IDENTITY**

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

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

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

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

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PERSONAL COMMUNICATIONS (TALANOA AND INTERVIEWS)

Dr. ‘Okusitino Māhina (Hūfanga): Tongan Anthropologist
Victor Narsimulu (Rotuman): UVU cultural envoy director, University of Utah PhD student
Robert Reeves (Tongan/Pālangi): Youth Corrections, Ogden Kava Boys Kalapu
Kis. B (Tongan): Hip Hop artist and producer, H.O.G. Farm Kalapu
Tangata Tonga Eiki (Anonymous Tongan elder over the age of 50)
Tangata Tonga (Anonymous Tongan man under the age of 50)
Fefine Tonga (Anonymous Tongan woman under the age of 50)
Tangata Moana (Anonymous Pacific Islander(s))
REFERENCE LIST

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