YAQONA (*KAVA*) AS A SYMBOL OF CULTURAL IDENTITY

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Abstract

Yaqona (more commonly known as *kava*), when coupled with its associated rituals and practices, is commonly recognised as a potent symbol of Fijian identity. However, there are some indigenous Fijians (*iTaukei*) who dispute this link, renouncing a connection between *yaqona* protocols, ceremony and conventions and their sense of cultural identity, therefore dissociating themselves from these practices. In this paper I draw on evidence from the literature together with observations and interviews to explain why some *iTaukei* distance themselves from *yaqona* consumption and the fullness of its cultural expression.

Keywords

identity, *kava*; *yaqona*, Fiji, Pacific cultural identifiers, Pentecostal Church

Introduction

Kava is well known in many Pacific Island societies and also Pacific diasporic communities. It is an ingestible beverage produced by straining the dried and pounded root and basal stem portion of the tropical plant *Piper methysticum Forst. f.* through water. In Fiji, the plant—whether freshly harvested or in its drinkable form is integral to every event from birth to death that features ritual performances

(Aporosa, 2008: 29–36). *iTaukei* (Indigenous Fijians) colloquially refer to *kava* as *grog*, athough when spoken of in more formal discussion, both *yaqona* and *wainivanua* (or 'water of the *vanua*') are used. Ravuvu (1983: 76) adds meaning to the latter term when he explained that,

> *Vanua literally means land, but also refers to the social and cultural aspects of the physical environment identified with a social group. On the social plane it includes the people and how they are socially structured and related to one another. On the cultural plane it embodies the values, beliefs and the common ways of doing things.*

Therefore, *wainivanua* refers to an ingestable representation of the land, people and culture (Aporosa, 2014a: 68).

Once prepared in its beverage form, *yaqona* (the descriptor that will predominantly be used in this paper when referring to *kava* in Fiji) becomes a sacred and living entity, one that both embodies *mana*[2] and has the ability to enhance a person's *mana* (Turner, 1986: 209; Tomlinson, 2004: 669). Further, in most villages across Fiji, the working day ends with the men, and occassionally the women, sitting crosslegged at the *tanoa* (*yaqona* bowl) discussing the day, plans for the next, together with the latest news or gossip (Aporosa, 2008: 80–82).

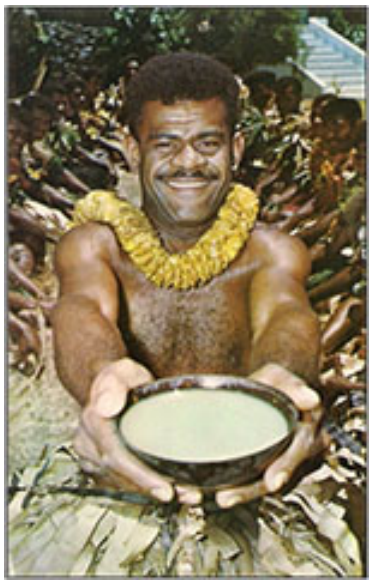

Figure 1 – Postcard: iTaukei serving yaqona (unknown producer).

According to Ratuva (2007: 92–6,98–9) and Vakabua (2007: 103), the drinking of *yaqona* demonstrates, externalizes and personifies 'Fijian-ness' and the Fijian way.

Figure 2 – Fijian one cent piece. (Source: Government of Fiji, 2006).

Yaqona's expression of Fijian-ness has led to icons such as the *tanoa* and the preparation and/or serving of the indigenous substance frequently being drawn on as symbols of nationalism (Figure 1). For instance the *tanoa* is depicted on the Fijian one cent piece (Figure 2) and also comprises the logo and trophy for the annual *Ratu Sukuna Bowl* inter-services (Police versus Army) rugby competition (Figure 3) (Dean and Ritova, 1988: 118).

Figure 3 – Polo-shirt logo: Ratu Sukuna Bowl. (Source: Republic of Fiji Military Forces, 2009).

The union of the competition and the *tanoa* with *Ratu* Sir Lalabalavu Sukuna (1888–1958, Fijian chief, soldier, statesman and scholar, and a man considered to have personified the ideal *iTaukei*) further demonstrates Fijian-ness (Scarr, 1980: 198–9; Lal, 1985: 433). Vastly more overt references can also be seen within *Tourism Fiji* advertising, on postcards (Figures 1, 4, and 5) and prepaid telecards (Figures 6).

Figure 4 – Postcard: iTaukei serving yaqona.
(Source: Siers, J., c1979, author of Fiji in Colour).

Figure 5 – Postcard: tanoa (yaqona bowl) and images of sale, export and research.
(Source: University of the South Pacific, undated).

Figure 6 – Telecard: iTaukei mixing yaqona. (Source: Fiji Posts & Telecommunications Limited, 1994).

Although these comments appear to unquestioningly present *yaqona* use and its related practices as emblematic manifestations of *iTaukei* identity, this is not universally accepted. For instance, two *iTaukei* academics challenged this stated union at a conference I spoke at in late 2010.[3] Both were adamant that *yaqona* did not comprise their identity with one adding that minimal use of this indigenous substance within their own village was 'evidence' of this. It was not the challenge that surprised me as such comments had infrequently been made to me in the past. Rather, it was that this had been asserted by *iTaukei* academics whose research presentation at the same conference had also included discussion on *yaqona*, commentary that appeared to me to support my *iTaukei*/identity claim. The challenge then prompted me to re-evaluate my statement, sift the literature and discuss the theme with others familiar with this traditional substance. Therefore, this paper is not an attack on how some perceive or define their identity; rather it is a considered response to that challenge.

What the Literature Says

Linnekin (1990: 158–60) states that for Pacific people, symbols and icons are an important part of defining collectivist identities. Hamrin-Dahl (2013: 32) adds that Pacific Islanders have used traditional objects, icons and practices in the post-colonial period to affirm constructs of identity in contrast with the European 'Other'. She states that in contemporary Hawaii and Samoa, the *kava* bowl has been adopted as a "national symbol" of post-colonial identity and sovereignty (ibid, 2013: 32–34). In addition to a *kava* bowl, the official Seal of American Samoa (Figure 7) also includes a *fue* (fly switch), another traditional object of significance to a number of Pacific ethnicities. Other icons of Pacific identity include the *taro* plant, coconut palm, *frangipani* flower and *kava*.

Figure 7 – Official Seal of Western Samoa

In their foundational text entitled *Kava: The Pacific Elixir*, Lebot, et al. (1992: 198) assert that this indigenous substance "plays a unique role in the social life of many Pacific societies… [as part of] asserting their cultural identity". They also appear to acknowledge *kava*'s link with Fijian cultural identity as the cover displays *iTaukei* in traditional dress serving *yaqona* (Figure 8). Regarding Tonga, Finau et al. (2002: 59) comment that *kava* use is a way in "which Tongan's have maintained their cultural identity" whereas more recently Fehoko (2014: 91) stated that *faikava* consumption venues act as sites of cultural continuance in which values, the language, traditions and beliefs are "reinforced... thus reaffirming their Tongan identity". In Vanuatu, Young (1995: 61) described *kava* as important to outworking *kastom* and a "symbol of national identity". On Pohnpei, an island within the Federation of Micronesia group where *kava* is called *sakau*, Balick and Lee (2009: 165) explain that the primary role of the plant and the drink made from it, is in "defining Pohnpeian cultural identity". Petersen (2014: 4) adds that the presence of a "kava cup… [in] the center of the Pohnpei State flag" demonstrates kava's "fundamental [link] to Pohnpeians' sense of identity". Anthropologist Dr. Nancy Pollock (1995: 2) neatly summarises this collection of comments when she states that, "In Tonga, Samoa, Futuna, Fiji and Pohnpei *kava* usage persists as an 'external symbol' of both current and past ideologies".

Yaqona and identity are central themes in Professor Ian Gaskell's (2001b) book that reviewed and critiqued eight Fijian theatrical dramas. He stated that these "express a

collective image of Fiji" (2001a: 8). Commenting on one drama in particular, he suggested this is a

> *… depiction of life in a Fijian village. The play is infused with the objects, forms and rhetoric of Fijian ritual. No less than six of the nine scenes, for example, are staged around the kava bowl. As a cultural symbol, kava consumption serves to create a sense of authenticity, an assertion of a particularly Fijian context for the action.* (2001b: 10)

As if to reinforce this point, the cover of Gaskell's book depicts *iTaukei* mixing *yaqona* (Figure 9). He goes on to say, "The final scene is clearly an affirmation of cultural identity, represented by the... formal use of kava" (2001b: 10). Referring to another drama, Gaskell describes a scene in which a character is urged to consume *yaqona*, suggesting that this is a "powerful identification with Fijian culture" (2001b: 10).

The Fijian Government illustrated the importance of *yaqona* to identity in their *New Dawn* publication (Ministry of Information, 2010: 1–3). The article discusses the work of the *Institute of iTaukei Language and Culture* and their aim to "preserve *iTaukei* identity". Although no written reference is made to *yaqona*, the story features a large photograph of two *iTaukei* dressed in traditional costume mixing the beverage, clearly linking the practice with the stated objective of preserving cultural identity. Moreover, while this article and those discussed above (see Gaskell; Ratuva, and Vakabua) collectively put forward valuable commentary on the existence of a union between *yaqona* and *iTaukei* identity, it is Sekove Degei who potentially provides the most conclusive comment on this theme. A lecturer at the Department of Fijian Studies at the University of the South Pacific, Degei developed this statement by drawing on six sources of literature, some by prominent academics such as Marshal Sahlins (2004: 161–3), Ron Brunton (1988: 16–17) and Christina Toren (1990: 90,99). He asserted, "To the Fijians, *yaqona* is a link to the past, a tradition so inextricably woven into the fabric of culture, that life and social processes would be unimaginable without it. Although the use of *kava* is common among other people groups in the South Pacific, for the Fijian, *yaqona* is clearly linked to concepts of identity" (Degei, 2007: 3).

What the Ethnographer Says

An aspect of my Doctoral field research was to compare the *yaqona* consumption habits of *iTaukei* and Indo-Fijian school-teachers. During that research I was frequently told that *iTaukei* consumed more *yaqona* than their Indo-Fijian peers (Aporosa, 2014a: 113–116). At the time I accepted this as fact, influenced from my time as a teacher and development worker in rural Fiji where we often discussed this issue and assured each other that no one drank as much *yaqona* as 'we' did. However, to my surprise I learnt from the *Fiji National Nutrition Survey*—which sampled over 7300 participants—that Indo-Fijians were actually consuming "significantly more" (10%) *yaqona* than *iTaukei* on a daily basis (Schultz, et al., 2007: 1,180). This then raised the question as to why *iTaukei* believe and perpetuate the idea that they drink more *yaqona* than their Indo-Fijian counterparts, an answer that adds to the theme of this paper.

As part of inquiring into this question, I discussed this matter at length with Dr. Matt 'Maciu' Tomlinson. Tomlinson is an anthropologist specialising in discourse analysis who has lived and worked in Fiji over the past 15 years and spent hundreds of hours at *yaqona* sessions conducting research. Essentially Tomlinson suggested that *iTaukei* believe and perpetuate the idea that they drink more *yaqona* than their Indo-Fijian counterparts because of the importance of the traditional substance to them and their identity (Tomlinson, 2009a). Tomlinson added, "It is difficult to overestimate the importance of this myth" [that *iTaukei* believe they drink more than Indo-Fijians]. This is because *iTaukei* perceive *yaqona* consumption as literally taking their *vanua* into their body through ingestion, an action that emblematicly illustrates and demonstrates Fijian-ness. Therefore, Tomlinson asserted *iTaukei* unquestioningly 'expect' that they would drink more than Indo-Fijians because *iTaukei* are indigenous to the *vanua* whereas Indo-Fijian are not. The creation of this myth—'we drink more'—serves as the foundation of, and the reinforcement of a sense of self, and an affirmation of *iTaukei* identity.

What the Locals Say

An additional question asked of teachers during my field research was: if nightly *yaqona* consumption was found to negatively impact quality education delivery through a hang-over effect, should restrictions be put on its use? Although this question appears incongrous with the theme of this paper, participant responses frequently expressed issues of identity. For instance, a school Principal, reflecting the responses of more than 50 other participants, stated, "No one can stop us [drinking *yaqona*]. People might try to stop us but they can't because it is part of our culture, it shows we are Fijian". Another school Principal stated, "No, can't. See, *yaqona* is the cornerstone of our culture". A female *iTaukei* teacher added, "No, this is our drink, the *kaiViti* [Fijian] drink". A female Indo-Fijian school Principal who does not drink *yaqona*, and who also made a number of disparaging comments about the indigenous substance and its users during the interview, suggested prohibitions and bans would be futile. She then followed with, "nothing can be done coz *grog* is part of who they are, part of what makes them Fijian". A male Indo-Fijian *yaqona* consumer commented, "See we are Fijians, *grog* is part of the culture. No *grog*, no culture. *Grog* is like the lead actor in a film". Finally, a Senior Education Officer responded that although the Fijian Ministry of Education (MoE) has guidelines on *yaqona* use, it will never be prohibited "coz they [the MoE] know the importance of *yaqona* to the culture".

The responses of the Indo-Fijian teachers also revealed another interesting theme. Whereas there are some *iTaukei* who reject the link between *yaqona* and their cultural identity, these Indo-Fijian teachers; whose ancestry traces back to a geographic locality where *yaqona* does not grow and was therefore not part of their culture, were also quick to assert and/or acknowledge a union between *yaqona* and their own sense of identity. This is obvious in the comment of the Indo-Fijian teacher who stated, "See we are Fijians,"—he uses this in the collective meaning both *iTaukei* and Indo-Fijian—"*grog* is part of the culture…"—indicating the collective culture of the two dominant Fijian ethnicities, *iTaukei* and Indo-Fijian. A number of Indo-Fijian teachers also pointed to the inclusion of *iTaukei* specific *yaqona* related practices as part of their consumption style, whereas others suggested *yaqona* had become part of

Indo-Fijian socio-cultural expression (Brenneis, 1984; Aporosa, 2014a: 116–122). Collectively, what these *iTaukei* and Indo-Fijian teachers stated was, no matter the impacts of *yaqona* on teaching, little will change. The reasoning for this can be best summarised by reasserting what Degei stated above: *yaqona* is "so inextricably woven into the fabric of culture, that life and social processes would be unimaginable without it… [as it] is clearly linked to concepts of identity".

The Critics of '*Yaqona* as a Symbol of Cultural Identity'

The question that then arises is, with the literature and ethnographic evidence presented here overwhelming pointing to *yaqona* as the dominant cultural identifier, why are some *iTaukei* adamant that this indigenous substance does not comprise their identity? This is a theme I discussed at length with a large number of research participants and academics—both male and female—during my field research. Although some criticised the over use of *yaqona* as contributing to productivity loss and socio-cultural impacts (a theme also discussed by Baba, 1996: 2; Lebot, et al., 1997: 199–201; Kava, 2002: 115; Naisilisili, 2002: 2–3; Aporosa, 2008: 15,52–3; Aporosa and Tomlinson, 2014: 163), this did not tend to lead to a rejection of *yaqona* as a symbol of cultural identity.[4] Instead, most stated that *iTaukei* who embrace this opinion predominantly belong to one of the newer Pentecostal Christian denominations such as the *All Nations* or *New Methodist* churches, or the older *Assemblies of God* (Meo-Sewabu and Ramacake, 2011). It must be stressed though that there are exceptions to this. For instance, I know a couple of members from these denominations who occasionally drink *yaqona*, especially if attending highly formal occasions. However, on the whole, my participants reported that *iTaukei* who are adament that *yaqona* does not comprise their identity belong to one of these denominations.

This though is in contrast to the beliefs of those from some of the older denominations. Ryle (2010: 20) states, "Pacific theologians have related the *kava* ceremony to the Christian Eucharist,… [paralleling this with] themes of self-sacrifice, leadership and service". The Samoan Catholic Church, for instance, identifies "Jesus Christ as a Heavenly Kava Root at Bethlehem" (Taofinu'u, 1973: 1–2). Samoan

Methodists believe that liquid *kava* has redemptive significance in the same manner as the Blood of Christ (**Fa'asi'i, 1993: 62)**. In the case of Fiji, Toren (1988) adds that many *iTaukei* liken images from Christ's *Last Supper* with servitude within the *yaqona* circle. She suggests Leonardo da Vinci's tapestry of *The Last Supper* "evokes the image of a group of clan chiefs [drinking *yaqona*] with the paramount [chief Jesus] at their centre"; the 'centre' inferring *icake* (in front of the *tanoa*, at the top, in the high position) and therefore symbolizing an act of worship (p.709). The tapestry image and symbolism, Toren argues, is "a material manifestation of 'the Fijian way'" (p.696), therefore emblemizing 'Fijian-ness' (also see Ryle, 2010: 23–5).

What then has influenced *iTaukei* from the newer denominates to steadfastly deny the link between *yaqona* and their identity? Mostly this appears to have its roots in the pre-colonial use of *yaqona* where the indigenous substance was used as a conduit for communication with the ancestral gods (Turner, 1986: 209; Lebot et al. 1997: 155; Linnekin, 1997: 412). *New Methodist Church* co-founder *Talatala* (Reverend) Atu Vulaono stated, yaqona "is a hold-over from pre-Christian religion and not from God" (Titus, 2009: 8; also see Vulaono, 2001). He added that yaqona is the "drink of Satan", used to disrupt *iTaukei* lifeways (Fiji Times, 2008a: 2; 2008b: 2). Several of my research participants explained that this message, whether explicit or implied, is preached from the pulpit of many of these Pentecostal churches aimed at eliminating the consumption of the so-called "drink of Satan" among their parishioners.[5] This is something I have experienced firsthand. At one time I worked in an *Assemblies of God* church and was occasionally criticised for imbibing '*the Devil's liquid*'.

I was in Fiji at the time *Talatala* Vulaono made his "Kava is evil" statement. This produced lively discussion at *yaqona* circles with reactions ranging from light-hearted jokes and dismissals of his views to heated debate that included suggestions that it was he who had been deceived by the Devil. However, what struck me most were the claims that Vulaono had rejected his culture, with comments such as "he is not a true *kaiViti*" being common. In the minds of many, Vulaono had forfeited his identity and cultural standing, not because he had ceased *yaqona* consumption (which even mainstream *yaqona* drinking Methodists do at times for reasons of *tabu* or fasting), but because he believed *yaqona* was the drink of, and an instrument of,

Satan. This connection to the Devil was in turn considered a threat to what *yaqona* symbolises, an ingestable manifestation of the *vanua* and an icon that emblematically illustrates and demonstrates Fijian-ness, and therefore *iTaikei* identity.

In mid January 2012 I was at a leadership team meeting of the *Hamilton* (New Zealand) *Fijian Methodist Church* when issues related to cultural identity and *yaqona* were discussed.[6] This meeting was held in the garage of one of the leaders with those present dressed in *suluvakataga* (wrap-around formal skirt with pockets worn by men) and colourful *bula* shirts seated crosslegged in heirarchal order on *ibe* (woven mats) around a *tanoa* drinking *yaqona*. One of those present (who had recently immigratred to New Zealand) explained that the message discouraging *yaqona* use by those in these newer denominations was often based on the Biblical scripture, "*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!*" (2 Corinthians 5:17, NIV). He added that many of the practices associated with *yaqona* and the pre-Christian era were categorised by the newer neo-Christian denominations as comprising "*the old*". Additionally "*the old*" also included selected *meke* (traditional dance) and the use of *tabua* (whale's teeth) and *yaqona* as part of marriage negotiation (Ravuvu, 1983: 46). In contrast, "*the new*" is deemed to be a complete abandonment of "*the old*" traditional ways with members of these newer Pentecostal denominations encouraged, for instance, to use boxes of soap and orange juice instead of *tabua* and *yaqona* in marriage negotiation.

For others at the leadership meeting, this topic was new to them and it prompted lengthy debate. This included concerns over cultural continuity and suggestions that high divorce rates were inevitable when marriages were being 'founded on plastic protocols' (referring to the use of non-traditional items during the negotiation process) whereas traditional items carried with them the 'substance and solidity' of the past; a legacy that was argued to aid marital longevity. Another asked, "how can you apologise with no *yaqona*?" The presentation of *yaqona* is a key aspect of apology ceremonies, which are part of a culturally based relational restorative process focused on ideals of behaving in a *vakaturaga* (chiefly) manner. Behaving *vakaturaga* means that people will be unified and forgiving of one another. For example, this is seen in one kind of apology ritual known as *matanigasau*, both a process and an event

which sees parties meet, present and mix *yaqona*, discuss the issues that led to any conflict or relational breakdown followed by apologies and the sharing of the traditional substance (Ratuva, 2002: 157).

As discussed above, *yaqona* is an ingestible manifestation of the *vanua*. Therefore apology ceremonies, with its sharing of *yaqona*, symbolically demonstrates the reuniting of the *vanua*, a process one of the leaders felt would lack affect with orange juice as this drink has no connection with the *vanua*. Further, concerns were raised regarding the potential for loss of traditional knowledge and cultural identity and concomitantly the effects this could have on future generations. With *yaqona* and most other traditional practices being linked with *vakaturaga*, a leader questioned how this would impact on youth behaviour.[7] Although no conclusions were reached, there was a general consensus that research was needed on the potential for socio-cultural instability that could result from the influence of these Pentecostal denominations, a suggestion I would argue has merit.

This though is not a new topic. Twenty years ago UNESCO reported that "the loss of culture", or cultural identity, is at "the heart of our... social problems" (Teasdale and Teasdale, 1992a: 1). This they stated was not limited to indigenous cultures but also the "dominant societies of the west [who] have moved so far along the road of capitalism, with its emphasis on competition, the consumption of goods and services, and the exploitation of the world's non-renewable resources that they too are losing their deepest roots" which in turn has seriously impacted socio-cultural stability. The report concluded that "Culturally appropriate teaching and learning is integral" to socio-cultural stability, a process and goal that is reliant upon depth of cultural identity (Teasdale and Teasdale, 1992b: 70). Thaman (1992a: 30; 1992b: 10–12; 1995: 725) concurs, arguing that a lack of understanding of one's personal culture is a factor in the breakdown of socio-cultural values (for more recent commentary on this theme, see Rao and Walton, 2004; Nederveen Pieterse, 2010; Aporosa, 2014a; Aporosa and Tomlinson, 2014).

Minimal *Yaqona* Use Within My Own Village Is 'Evidence' That It Is Not Part of My Identity

I mentioned earlier that one of the academics who had prompted me to investigate this theme of *yaqona/kava* and identity had added that the minimal use of the traditional substance within their own village was evidence that *yaqona* was not part of their identity. Although I have not visited their particular village, I would respond by arguing that over the past 15 years I have travelled extensively throughout Fiji, having stayed, and in some cases lived, for extended periods in villages across Viti Levu, Kadavu, Vanua Levu, Ovalau and even in the depths of Southern Lau where *yaqona* cannot grow. In every single place I have visited, without exception, there was substantial *yaqona* drinking going on, much of which I participated in.

Additionally, I have also stayed in villages in which *tabu* (prohibition for cultural or Church reasons) was in place concerning *yaqona*. However, it did not take me long to find a *yaqona* circle in progress. I would argue then that while there may be the odd isolated village where there is no *yaqona* consumption, in most cases, *iTaukei* who suggest that minimal *yaqona* use within their village is 'evidence' that it is not part of their identity are glossing over behaviours they wish was not there, but actually are. Tomlinson (2004; also see 2009b: 121–3) discussed a similar situation within his theory of "perpetual lament", explaining how feelings of indigenous loss and disempowerment are perpetually lamented at *yaqona* sessions. He described how *iTaukei* "lament" the 'old days', a time when the ancestors consumed less *yaqona* than 'we' do today, whilst simultaneously engaging in vigorous *yaqona* consumption. Therefore, while some may wish *yaqona* was not being consumed within their village, or while others may perpetually lament an alternative lifeway, Degei's observations (as discussed above) dominate. This is because *yaqona* is "so inextricably woven into the fabric of culture, that life and social processes would be unimaginable without it"; unimaginable because all over Fiji *iTaukei* imbibe *yaqona* as it comprises a potent symbol of their identity.

Conclusion

This article is the result of a challenge in which two academics refuted my assertion that *yaqona/kava* is the most potent emblematic manifestation of *iTaukei* identity. I have supported my claim in this paper by drawing on literature, ethnographic and state sources. That discussion also demonstrated *yaqona*'s inclusion as part of Indo-Fijian identity formation. This though raised the question as to why some *iTaukei* believe this iconic symbol and ritual drink does not comprise their identity. While impacts to productivity and socio-culture were cited as part of the reason, anti-*yaqona* rhetoric stemming from the newer neo-Christian fundamentalist Churches was cited as the most dominant reason.

This type of tension though is not limited to *yaqona/kava* and the Pacific. Similar concerns are currently being debated regarding the use of *coca* in Peru and Bolivia (Aporosa, 2014a: 28), betel-nut in Papua New Guinea (Aporosa, 2014a: 33–34) and *khat* (an indigenous substance used widely thoughtout the Islamic world) in the United Kingdom (Klein, 2013; McGonigle, 2013).

In summing up, I would argue that while some may dispute and wish to undermine the significance of an indigenous substance or icon as the dominant cultural/national symbol of identity—such as asserting that '*yaqona* is not part of *my* identity'—this simply reflects the personal opinions of a minority hoping for a cultural shift. However, regardless of the depth of that desire, it does not alter the reality for the majority of an ethnicity; which is the case with *yaqona* and *iTaukei*. Dalton et al. (2001: 10–13) reinforce this reality in their discussion on community psychology's Ecological Levels (also known as Systems theory). They state that "Individuals, societies, and the layers of relationships between them are interdependent". Newman and Newman (2011: 50) add,

> *Systems theories take the position that the whole is more than the sum of its parts… Any system—whether it is a cell, an organ, an individual, a family, or a corporation—is composed of interdependent elements that share some common goals, interrelated functions, boundaries, and an identity. The system cannot be*

> *wholly understood by identifying each of its component parts. The process and relationships of those parts make for a larger, coherent entity. The language system for example, is more than the capacity to make vocal utterances, use grammar, and acquire vocabulary. It is the coordination of these elements in a useful way in a context of shared meaning. Similarly, a family system is more than the sum of the characteristics and components of the individual members.*

As Newman and Newman (2010: 50–2) note, System theory includes identity. Therefore the identity of the majority "cannot be [altered or subverted by the personal opinions of] its component parts", or a minority. It is the majority that dictates the "context of shared meaning", or in the case of this paper, identity. As such, assertions that '*yaqona* is not part of *iTaukei* identity', whether imagined or hoped for, does not alter the indigenous substance's fundamental link with identity for the majority of *iTaukei*, a union academics argue is found throughout Pacific Island societies in both original and diasporic locations.

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Endnotes

[1] 'Apo' Aporosa is maternally related to the village of Naduri in Macuata, Fiji. He has a PhD. in Development Studies from Massey University, New Zealand, and is currently a researcher at the Waikato-Tainui College for Research and Development.

[2] According to Tomlinson (2006: 174) this word defies a simplistic meaning. However, '*mana*' in Fijian is often best translated into English as 'work', 'succeed', 'achieve', or the like—that is, as a verb denoting effective action. Like 'work', '*mana*' is a verb that can be used nominally or adjectivally without altering its form. It can also be reduplicated and given affixes (e.g., '*vakamanamanataka*', meaning 'make *mana*' or 'make effective') and used in conjunction with other words."

[3] While presenting a paper entitled *Yaqona (kava), education, and development in Fiji* at the 5th Annual Pasifika@Massey Conference, Massey University, November 11, 2014, I stated, "*yaqona* demonstrates, externalizes and personifies Fijian-ness and the Fijian way and is the dominant symbol of cultural identity for *iTaukei*" (also see Aporosa, 2011a: 231).

[4] From my experience, it was mostly women—both *iTaukei* and Indo-Fijian—who tend to point to socio-cultural impacts from *yaqona* use. This was alluded to in the comment by the Indo-Fijian school Principal (see section above: 'What the local says'). She described her struggle as a Vice Principal, having "to run the entire school on my own" while her Principal—a male—was frequently away consuming *yaqona* during school hours (Aporosa, 2014a: 138). Another woman spoke to me about having to cope with a husband (teacher) who was "lazy, sleeps a lot" after *yaqona* drinking (ibid, 2014a: 138). Women's concerns' regarding *yaqona* has also been discussed by other commentators. Concerns include lengthy *yaqona* sessions blamed for removing men from the home and their responsibilities, *yaqona* consumption in the home which interferes with children trying to complete homework, and/or the purchasing of *yaqona* and its impact on the family budget (Defrain et al. 1994: 41; Puamau, 1999: 159; Singh, 2007: 7). I too have heard such criticism over the years in both Fiji and New Zealand from women of several different *kava*-consuming ethnicities. However, I have also consumed *yaqona/kava* with these same women shortly after—and even while—they have been making these criticisms. Moreover, while these women may be frustrated concerning these issues, I have found that most will equally espouse the traditional substance when discussing it in the context of tradition and cultural practice, demonstrating *yaqona/kava* as important to their sense of identity.

[5] A recent Fiji Times article demonstrates the use of the Church, doctrine and implied socio-cultural impacts from *kava* use in trying to influence anti-*yaqona* sentiment. The article was headed, *'Kavaholics' told to drink in moderation* (Rawalai, 2014: online). The body of the article did commence with an interesting point, that "There is no medical proof that *yaqona* consumption contributes directly to diabetes and other non-communicable diseases". It then briefly raised concerns over the consumption of high sugar and salt *chasers* (food items used by some during *yaqona* drinking sessions) and the potential for this to contribute to diabetes. However, dominating was anti-*yaqona* commentary that had no link with the focus of the article. This included comments such as *yaqona* causing skin irritation and lethargy, finishing with, "heavy kava drinkers changed God's schedule for men by drinking all night and sleeping all day making people lazy". In a letter to the Editor, I responded that the article had great potential to address an important health issue—diabetes—although it was instead used as a 'front' for personal agenda and biased reporting, evidenced through the use of 'loaded' terminology such as "kavaholic" and non-related issues including God's disrupted plan as a result of *yaqona* consumption (Aporosa, 2014b: online). I also pointed out that to blame *yaqona/kava* could be likened to blaming knives for cutting people or alcohol for promoting disorderly behaviour. *Yaqona*, just like knives and alcohol related behaviour, is not to blame; it is the choices people make before, during and following *yaqona* use that must be the focus, not the traditional icon itself. Such short sighted and inflammatory commentary has the potential to create more harm than good as traditional icons and practices—such as *yaqona*

use—are critical to identity formation and cultural continuance. Moreover, research suggests the removal of these cultural identifiers disrupts cultural systems which have the potential to negatively impact empowerment, self-worth, traditional knowledge, productive systems and educational achievement (for more, see Aporosa, 2014a: 172–3).

[6] This specific discussion—the Church, *yaqona* and identity—also had links to an earlier situation in which Pasifika members of the *Hamilton* (combined) *Methodist Church* (New Zealand) were asked to cease consuming *yaqona/kava* in the Church hall as *kava* was believe by some of the European congregation to be alcohol. I discuss this situation in an article entitled, *Is kava alcohol?: The myths and the facts* (Aporosa, 2011b).

[7] In a recent New Zealand based study, Fehoko (2014) investigated the role that *faikava* clubs play in the lives of New Zealand-born Tongan males. He reported that these gathering places—centred around *kava* consumption—act as a "cultural classroom" where the Tongan language, cultural values, traditional practices and discussion "reinforce identity" and provide an alternative to alcohol and drug use and the attraction of youth gangs (Matthias, 2014). Fehoko added, "This [*kava*] is what we are and this is what makes us different from everyone else. Kava has, is and if we continue doing this in the future, will continue to define us as Tongans" (ibid, 2014: 94; also see Black, 2015: video).

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