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Bodies Permeable and Divine: Tapu, Mana and the Embodiment of Hegemony in Pre-Christian Tonga

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This ethnohistorical essay explores the body's metaphysical conceptualisation in pre-Christian Tonga to explain the former relationship between the concepts of *mana* (metaphysical efficacy), *tapu* (ritual prohibition or closure) and *'eiki* (chiefliness). These concepts have often been discussed as interrelated in historical Polynesia—chiefly persons and things being considered *mana* and therefore sources of *tapu*. The precise theological basis of their relationship, however, has not been adequately addressed. Here I explore the nature of *mana* and *tapu* in pre-Christian Tonga up to the early nineteenth century. It is well documented that Christian conversion in Tonga triggered the breakdown of what Methodist missionaries called the 'tapu system', a complex of hierarchical principles, avoidance relationships, economic controls, ritual prohibitions and ceremonial practices explored centrally here. Practically speaking, this historical process of cosmological transformation spanned the period 1820–75, and permanently changed the ontological realities of kin and gender relations, class identities and political legitimacy in Tonga (Lawry 1850; West 1865: 126).

I argue that a sophisticated metaphysical system existed in Tonga during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries which conceptually articulated the phenomenological perception of mana through tapu, and tapu through bodily experience. Historical evidence presented here shows that mana and chieflyhood had complex relationships with tapu and one another precisely because their interaction was physiologically mediated. I reconstruct the anatomical concept of *manava* to interpret the phenomenology of tapu; the interpersonal dynamics of the *'api* (territorially restricted household of co-resident siblings and their conjugal units) and *kainga* (extended kin group of several *'api*); the ritual transformations of the life cycle and the articulation of social class (Tupouniua 1977: 13–14). By this route, I will explore how mana, tapu and *'eiki* interacted through embodied experience. Derived from the perceptual phenomenology of Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1962), the anthropology of embodiment takes the view that the body is what Thomas J. Csordas (1990: 39–40) defined as ‘the existential ground of culture’, calling for us ‘to investigate how cultural objects (including selves) are constituted ... in the ongoing indeterminacy and flux of adult cultural lives’. Viewed thus, enculturated human interactions, and particularly ritual practices, become embodied texts of legible *action signs*, subject to parsing for the deduction of phenomenological realities informing them (Bargatzky 1996; Farnell 1999: 358ff).

Mana’s analysis has been consistently concerned with embodiment and materiality. Although the mana Robert H. Codrington (1891: 118–19) encountered in Melanesia was a supernatural, non-physical influence through which things were achieved, early anthropologists modelled it as a hydraulic metaphysical life force that persons or objects contained—akin to the Greek humours, Chinese *qi* or Hindu *prana* (Handy 1927; Marett 1929). Raymond Firth’s (1940: 490–92) discussion of mana and *manu* on Tikopia rejected simplistic hydraulic interpretations, but his belief in mana’s immateriality led him to discount Tikopian statements that mana resided in the hands or lips of a chief as metaphorical, despite observing that his informants only identified mana through the material evidence of its effects. He also overlooked the possibility that mana might have both material and immaterial manifestations. Most subsequent works have read mana as an adjectival or adverbial quality of immaterial efficacy that persons, objects and acts *are* (Keesing 1984; Sahlins 1985: 37–38;

Shore 1989: 137–39). Claude Lévi-Strauss (1987: 63–64) took mana's immateriality further, deeming it a 'floating signifier' lacking any stable meaning: a classic case of what scholars don't understand being minimised as meaningless.

The debate over mana has clearly been motivated by western philosophical preoccupations with dualisms of mind and body, idealism and materialism, rather than the characteristics of Polynesian religious systems; anything which manifests the efficacy of both gods and human beings is self-evidently material, immaterial and polysemic. Bradd Shore's (1989: 163) regional analysis of mana and tapu in Polynesia recognised this, modelling a 'complex economy of powers' through which the benevolence and fertility of deities and ancestors, the ritual and secular leadership of chiefs, the reproductive and productive labour of men and women, and the lives of animals and sacrificial victims became commodities circulating in a unified system. Mana consequently becomes fluid cultural capital commensurating these commodities by their common manifestation of it—a currency of sociality specifically transcending false distinctions between materiality and immateriality to articulate the relationships of the divine and mortal, living and dead, chiefly and common.

Mana and tapu were understood differently in each Austronesian society because their meanings diverged over four millennia of migration into Remote Oceania (Kirch and Green 2000: 239–41). Robert Blust (2007) supports such a view in deducing that mana primarily signified 'thunder' in the Proto-Oceanic (POC) language spoken by the makers of Lapita-style ceramics in the Bismarck Archipelago four millennia ago. Thunder is one of its modern Tongan meanings (Churchward 1959: 329–30). We must seriously consider the possibility that (circa 1100 BC) Tonga's original settlers may still have primarily viewed mana as a meteorological phenomenon rather than metaphysical efficacy. This alterity of ancient mana has wider significance, because Patrick V. Kirch and Roger C. Green (2000: 201–36 *passim*) have reconstructed the 'Ancestral Polynesian Society' (circa 500 BC – 500 AD) in Western Polynesia as a classless kinship-based society of small autonomous communities. This suggests that the eighteenth-century understanding of the Tongan chiefly class (*hou'eiki*) as intrinsically mana and tapu developed as an aspect of those crystallising class identities during the later first millennium AD, because oral histories begin shortly afterwards which strongly associate

the *hou'eiki* with divinely derived mana (Campbell 2001; Mahina 1990). While archaeological lexicostatistics can illuminate these major processes of Tongan prehistory, it implies that the relationship between mana, tapu and *'eiki* has undergone complex transformations. I contend that, to understand this relationship, we must reconstruct how tapu was physiologically experienced, and a precondition of that is an understanding of *manava*.

The *manava* system as embodied vitality

Considering how few discussions of *manava* have been published, it is notable that all assert an etymological origin in mana (Collocott 1921: 433–34; Refiti 2008, 2009; Wendt 1996: 42). According to historical comparative linguistics, however, *manava* is one of two modern Tongan reflexes of the Proto-Malayo-Polynesian (PMP) word *ma-ñawa* (literally 'breath'), which signifies the heart, lungs, stomach, intestines, womb and bowels. The other reflex, *mānava*, still signifies the breath (Robert Blust, personal communication, 2014; *Polynesian Lexicon Project Online* 2015; *Austronesian Comparative Dictionary* 2015); neither word originated in mana. As E.E.V. Collocott (1921: 433–34) observed, it is clear that *manava* and *mānava* encompassed the body's organs and processes of animation. Evidencing that the psyche was equally implicated, John Martin (1818: 312) recorded that the *fotomanava* (tailbone of the *manava*, the heart's right auricle) was the bodily location of a person's consciousness. The term *loto* (inside) has largely replaced *manava* in modern Tongan, but still preserves its conflation of the viscera into a unified meta-organ and the affective core. Notably, those organs subsumed into the *manava* perform the body's processes of exchange: taking in air, water, food and sperm; expelling carbon dioxide, urine, faeces, menstrual blood and neonates—*manava* and *mānava* mediate the physical boundary between an organism and its environment. These animation processes are also subject to rhythmic muscular contractions and convulsions, and this link is explicitly retained by *manava*'s two recombinant nouns: *manamanava* and *manavanava*, which both signify throbbing sensations (Churchward 1959: 331).

Manava's historical significance as the primary Tongan concept of bodily animation led it to develop several dependent constructions, such as the verbs *manava'aki* (literally 'about *manava*', meaning 'to eat') and *mānava'aki* (about *mānava*, meaning to breathe). These terms generalised *manava-mānava* into a conceptual cluster that encompassed respiratory, digestive and reproductive animation. Similarly, *manava-fasi* (literally 'broken *manava*') signifies undernourishment in Tongan, and illustrates that the conversion of food into observable health was (logically) contingent upon the proper functioning of *manava*. Further affective complexity emerges when we consider another branch of dependent constructions which indicate a strong connection between *manava*, courage and fear (see Table 1).

Table 1. Dependent Tongan constructions of emotion from *manava*.

Tongan	English	English Gloss
Manava-hoko	articulated <i>manava</i>	courageous
Manava-lahi	big <i>manava</i>	courage
Manava-si'i	little <i>manava</i>	nervousness
Manava-fo'i	defeated <i>manava</i>	fear
Manava-he	<i>manava</i> -less	abject terror
Fakatau-manava	test <i>manava</i>	to pluck up courage

Source: C. Maxwell Churchward, 1959. *Tongan Dictionary*. Nuku'alofa: Government Printing Press, pp. 106, 330–31.

Evidently, larger or smaller *manava* enabled more or less courage. *Manava* was tested in some way by fearful situations, and either withstood them or was overpowered and diminished. By interconnecting the breath and courage, *manava-mānava* explains why sneezing was considered a terrible omen when early nineteenth-century warriors set out to war; an involuntary expulsion of breath suggested an incontinence of *manava* that warriors wanted to avoid (Martin 1818: 249–50). Connecting *manava* with courage sheds further light, because historical sources for both early nineteenth-century Tonga and Fiji record that the liver (Tongan '*ate*', Fijian *yate*) was the body's repository of courage (Im Thurn 1922a: cviii–cix; Martin 1818: 312). To summarise: respiration, digestion, reproduction, consciousness and courage were unified by a single

bodily *manava* system. The *manava* was a meta-organ, and we can reconstruct that the right auricle of the heart and the liver were its sub-loci of consciousness and courage respectively. Variable quantities or sizes of *manava* resided within the body, reflecting variable quantities of embodied vitality, being and will for the Tongans of 200 years ago. Let us next address tapu, as it was through the *manava* system that tapu manifested its detrimental effect.

The phenomenology of tapu in pre-Christian Tonga

I now begin a substantial discussion of the phenomenological realities and ritual management of tapu. I make a heuristic (if artificial) distinction here between three different senses of tapu in historical Tonga, signifying the different contexts in which it was used. I define *episodic tapu* as a potentially fatal episode of metaphysically induced sickness; *relational tapu* as a prohibitive relationship between two persons or things which engendered an episodic tapu in the inferior; and *regulatory tapu* as a prohibition imposed by chiefly authorities on specific food resources or activities for political, religious or economic reasons. I will address each here. Tongan tapu translates into English as 'sacred', 'forbidden' and 'closed', and although it was regrettably omitted from Shore's regional synthesis (1989: 143–48), this third quality of closure is integral. Closure is a quality repeated by the term *malu*, a verb indicating the act of observing a tapu and a noun indicating a strict physical closure (such as constipation or inability to urinate). Several terms connote the release or absence of tapu, but the most common was *ngofua*, meaning 'not tapu', 'permissible' or 'easy' (Churchward 1959: 13, 26, 390); tapu was therefore a problematic affliction described in terms of a physical closure.

One acquired an episodic tapu state by accidentally or unavoidably performing certain transgressions, which caused sickness and ultimately death unless it was released (Beaglehole 1988, II: 176–77; Martin 1818: 353–55). The known causes of episodic tapu in pre-Christian Tonga included touching the head, corpse, personal effects or food leftovers of a person more chiefly than oneself, eating in their sight-line, and eating a meat species or using a bathing place reserved for a higher social class (Collocott 1921: 420; Gifford 1929: 124).

As well as touching sources of tapu with the hands, eating was a metaphysically dangerous activity fundamental to episodic tapu development, and so the digestive processes of the *manava* system were closely involved. Importantly, an episodic tapu created by touch was not life-threatening to the transgressor unless they touched their hands to their mouth. Early observer William Mariner (Martin 1818: 104) explained:

[H]e must not feed himself with his own hands, but must be fed by somebody. He must not even use a toothpick himself, but must guide another person's hand holding the toothpick. If he is hungry, and there is no-one to feed him, he must go down upon his hands and knees, and pick up his victuals with his mouth. And if he infringes upon any of these rules, it is firmly expected that he will swell up and die.

Mariner's description conveys several facts: in order to threaten life, an episodic tapu needed to be physically ingested to enter the *manava* system; although the hands became episodically tapu, they were not *internally* connected with the *manava* system of the torso, but could only transmit the episodic tapu to it at its own opening. Nonetheless, the belief that handedness was determined by liver position in the abdomen shows that *manava* strongly influenced manual agency, although the relationship was one-way (Martin 1818: 312–13). That the victim could not use a toothpick indicates that normal material objects offered no barrier to the tapu. However, that the victim might hold another's hand and use a toothpick shows that the episodic tapu state was not physically contagious between people. Finally, that the victim 'will swell up and die' indicates a powerful visceral reaction to the tapu entering the *manava* system of the torso.

Adult men were key sources of tapu; it was dangerous for a man's child or wife to ever touch his head, touch any part of him while he was eating, consume his food or drink, or touch his bed, headrest, staff, weapons, fly-whisk or fan (Collocott 1921: 418; Gifford 1929: 18). If the man gave his permission for these acts, however, no episodic tapu ensued. As well as a concern for his head, we can recognise the preoccupation with eating and food outlined above, and those personal artefacts which he held in his hands. Prohibitions on the touching or consumption of an individual's food or personal possessions reflect the contagious distribution of personhood into artefacts (Frazer 1925: 11; Gell 1998: 96–104). Breaking the rules controlling contact with his private property, food and body caused

the transgressor sickness, swelling and eventual death unless the man performed *amohi* (relational stroking) of their head, throat or belly. The location depended on how the tapu was contracted, how much time had elapsed, and how far into the body the swelling phenomenon had penetrated. The hands were a primary source, and the alleviation, of episodic tapu within the household.

Further insights emerge concerning the emotion of *manahi* ('relational mana', a superior's anger). If a child, younger sibling or wife defied a senior man, his *manahi* had the power to cause them to sicken, swell up at the throat or abdomen and eventually die from asphyxiation or abdominal rupture—that is, develop an episodic tapu at any distance. This was only averted by submitting to his will and receiving *amohi* (Gifford 1929: 326–27). *Manahi* (a relational function of the superior's mana) ideologically enforced status asymmetry in the household by remotely engendering an episodic tapu which attacked the transgressor's *manava* system.

Episodic tapu was embodied, ingested and travelled downwards through the throat to the liver and other internal organs, causing an increasingly life-threatening swelling as it descended. Episodic tapu was indexed by those symptoms that western medicine classifies as scrofula, goitres, lymphatic and abdominal cysts, cirrhosis, tumours and similar disorders. Swellings (*kahi*) in the abdomen and neck are still frequently treated by traditional Tongan medicine, and attributed to internal blockages (George 1995; McGrath 1999: 493). Around 1800, postmortem eviscerations were frequently performed to assess a person's moral conduct by inspecting the size, shape, colour and markings on the liver, which was disfigured by tapu infractions (Martin 1818: 128n*). Episodic tapu in Tonga was materially embodied by engendering *kahi* swellings through the flow of vitality within the *manava* system.

Releasing episodic tapu

Episodic tapu was released by several methods. We have already encountered the *amohi* stroking of the head, throat or belly between a man and his subordinate family. If an unrelated victim knew that they had not eaten or touched their mouth since contracting the episodic tapu, they performed *moemoe'i*: pressing their palms, backhands and

forehead successively onto the sole of the foot of the more chiefly person from whom they had contracted the tapu, or (failing that) any high chief. Beyond the ritual's physical submission, *moemoe'i* describes the act of searching for something with the foot (as when gathering shellfish in the sea); the superior was seeking out and removing the episodic tapu (Beaglehole 1988, III: 116–17, 952–54; Labillardiere 1800, II: 144–46).¹ Discussing *moemoe'i*, Mariner observed that '[The Tongans] are very subject to indurations of the liver, and certain forms of scrofula ... which, as they conceive, frequently happen from a neglect of this ceremony' (Martin 1818: 128, 247). *Fota* (to massage by squeezing) was a more intensive form of *moemoe'i* required if the episodic tapu had been ingested; the superior pressed the sole of their foot on the victim's belly to neutralise the episodic tapu and prevent an abdominal *kahi* (Martin 1818: 355). Other common methods of releasing uningested episodic tapu were *veipa* and *fanofano*, which involved washing the hands in the sap of an immature banana tree (Collocott 1921: 436; Churchward 1959: 537).

The life-threatening swellings at the liver and throat caused by episodic tapu resulted from their being major nodes of the *manava* system. The largest of the viscera, the liver's susceptibility to episodic tapu arose from its function as the central organ of the *manava* system. The throat's susceptibility reflected it being the route by which breath and food pass from the head into the body. I discussed above that the terms tapu and *malu* signify tight closure, and the neck (as a physical narrowing) is partially 'closed' to begin with and logically prone to complete closure. The relationship between tapu and asphyxiation demands that we reconsider the pre-Christian practice of *naukia*—ritual killing by strangulation when making human sacrifices, executing the wives of dead chiefs to accompany them in the afterlife, and performing euthanasia. Those condemned to sacrifice were termed *tangata tapu* (tapu men), and their heads were shaved and painted with turmeric prior to killing. Two men throttled them with a barkcloth rope (Martin 1818: 348–49), which can be seen as a mechanical *malu* (closure) rendering the offering tapu before presentation. Thus, what

1 Tonga's paramount sacred king, the Tu'i Tonga, was almost constantly beset by the people to perform *moemoe'i* for them, as immortalised by the artist John Webber in his 1777 watercolour *Poulaho, King of the Friendly Isles, Drinking Kava* (Joppien and Smith 1988, III: 318, image 3.55).

amohi and *moemoe'i* prevented, *naukia* achieved. In neighbouring Fiji, such strangling was termed *yateba* and retained an etymological reference to the liver (*yate*) as its locus of effect (Im Thurn 1922a: cix).

Relational tapu and the 'eiki-tu'a dichotomy

I will now consider relational tapu in order to reconstruct the sociological basis of episodic tapu. Relational tapu identifies those situations where one individual was intrinsically tapu to another. The causes of relational tapu were primarily a complex set of kin relations and simpler social class identities. Several animal foods were prohibited for commoners, and the animal species that could serve as a manifestation vehicle for each individual's ancestral deity was equally tapu. Relational tapu emerged from the interaction between the social or species identities of two persons or animals, and episodic tapu was the sickening effect of exposure to relational tapu's defining conditions. In Piercean semiotic terms, a relational tapu was the *legisign* or systemic law, of which episodic tapu were the *sinsigns* or cases. In most cases, relational tapu was therefore an immutable condition which could not be released or rendered *ngofua*. As we shall see below, however, this was not always the case.

The category of 'eiki (chief or chiefly) and its antonym *tu'a* (commoner or common) were the articulating principles of relational tapu. Between any two Tongans, one is always 'eiki to the other, who is correspondingly *tu'a*. Within the traditional 'api household or the wider *kainga* kin group, everyone was asymmetrically ranked relative to the others, and relative 'eiki-*tu'a* statuses were determined by four fundamental rules of kinship. First, between *tokoua* (same-sex siblings)² the social rank of the father, mother and primogeniture successively defined relative 'eiki and *tu'a* statuses; this was equally true for males and females. Second, sisters (*tuofefine*) were invariably 'eiki to their brothers (*tuonga'ane*; see James 1995). Third, husbands were 'eiki to their wives. Fourth, immediately superior generations were 'eiki to immediately inferior ones (Bott 1982: 57; Tupouniua 1977: 22–25; Van der Grijp 1993: 131–33). The foregoing examples of episodic tapu and *manahi* show that it was these four hierarchical

2 As in all variants of the 'Hawaiian' kinship system, Tongan kinship makes no classificatory distinction between genetic siblings and cousins (Tupouniua 1977: 22–25).

principles which created relational tapu; all episodic tapu contractors share the *tu'a* position within these dyads. Those who were relatively 'eiki within the household were relationally tapu to those who were *tu'a* in relation to them. Thus, male (*tuonga'ane*) and female (*tuofefine*) siblings had a strong avoidance relationship because sisters were tapu to brothers (Aoyagi 1966: 162; Gifford 1929: 21–22). The father's sister (*mehekitanga*), as well as having particular rights and privileges in relation to her brother's children, was tapu to them (Douaire-Marsaudon 1996; Taumoeolau 1991). In contrast, the mother's brother (*tuasina*) was the focus of the *fahu* relationship through which his sororal nephew or niece had remarkable freedom to consume his food, claim his possessions and touch his head without incurring the episodic tapu that would debilitate his own children (Gifford 1929: 22–26). The grandfather (*kui tangata*) was similarly free to interact with his grandchildren (Völkel 2010: 183), and these double-articulated relationships illustrate the parallel redoubling and cancelling-out of tapu or *ngofua* statuses. Perhaps most compelling, foreign *matāpule* heralds were impervious to all causes of episodic tapu; lacking local kin relations and incapable of genealogical location, they were neither 'eiki nor *tu'a* to any Tongan, and sat outside the laws of relational tapu altogether (Gifford 1929: 141).

To summarise, the recorded principles of relational tapu organising episodic tapu's occurrence were a direct transformation of the 'eiki-*tu'a* (chiefly-common) dichotomy as it articulated interpersonal hierarchy within the household. Domestically, the 'tapu system' was a rational and sophisticated one that articulated status asymmetry, and *manava* was the physiological concept which embodied it. As to why genealogical rank engendered tapu, we can make an etic interpretation that the 'eiki-*tu'a* dimension collapsed filial piety, primogeniture, the marital subordination of women and the junior status of in-marrying sisters-in-law into a single operant principle. Tapu can therefore be construed as an ideological construct articulating (through *manava*) what we might call a *kainga mode of production* (cf. Godelier 1986: 232–36; Sahlins 1972). However, this view fails to account for the individual, relationship-specific, and longitudinally increasing nature of rank, which rendered everyone both inferior and superior in different relationships and life stages (Biersack 1982). In this way, the domestic 'eiki-tapu-*manava* interaction amounted to a truly hegemonic system in the Gramscian sense (1992: 155).

The ageing process changed one's *'eiki* and *tu'a* statuses, because every birth or marriage created new asymmetrical relationships, and every death (excepting religious interactions) eliminated a set. Consequently, individuals became progressively *'eiki* to more of their living kin over time. Seniority was therefore proximity to death and deceased or divine sources of mana. *'Eiki* was (paradoxically) both deathliness and the ancestral source of life, as shown by the origin myth of the first Tu'i Tonga Aho'eitu, apical ancestor of the most chiefly lineage in Tonga. His divine father Tangaloa 'Eitumatupu'a descended from the sky to impregnate the mortal woman Ilaheva Va'epopua, who was descended (like all *tu'a* commoners) from worms (Gifford 1929: 49; Helu 1999; Mahina 1990). Reaching his majority, her demigod son Aho'eitu ascended into the sky to claim his inheritance; his four divine half-brothers, however, jealously killed him and ate his body. Discovering this, Tangaloa forced the brothers to regurgitate Aho'eitu's remains into a kava bowl, in which Tangaloa magically resurrected him. Thereafter both dead and alive concurrently, Tangaloa sent Aho'eitu back to earth to rule Tonga as the origin of the state's mana.

***Manava* and the ritual dynamics of the pre-Christian life cycle**

Because a person's mana, and the number of persons to whom they were relationally tapu, grew over their lifetime, the pre-Christian ritual practices of the life cycle are replete with references to embodied *manava* processes. Rites of passage marking maternity and birth, puberty, adulthood and death physically engaged with the *manava* system in managing diachronically increasing seniority, deathliness, mana and relational tapu. Indeed, only contextualisation in terms of the *manava* system renders such ritual actions readable.

Maternity and the birth rite

Shore (1989: 144–48) discussed womanhood as intrinsically *noa* in Central Polynesia (a term equivalent, though not cognate, to *ngofua*), in opposition to the categorically tapu status of masculinity. F. Allan Hanson (1982), however, provides a very thorough refutation of the misogynistic earlier twentieth-century academic notion of the vulva, menstrual blood and womanhood itself as intrinsically polluting in

Polynesia, and demonstrates that Polynesian women could be just as tapu as men, as well as possessing a distinct power to release tapu states. Cosmological differences between pre-Christian Tonga and Aotearoa New Zealand suggest little applicability to Tonga of Hanson's affinity thesis that the vulva served as a gateway to the *po* and the power of the *atua*; my view is rather that the state-changing power of the vulva was the woman's own *manava*.

In Tonga, the radiant influence of the vulva meant that women were forbidden to step over categorically male products such as weapons, fishing canoes and equipment, or growing yam vines, for fear that their efficacy would be weakened (Gifford 1929: 344); the vulva's power as a conduit of the woman's *manava* was antagonistic to the efficacy of categorically male activities. Men were equally prohibited from interfering in women's work, and the clear inference is that (like familial interactions) gendered activities were rendered vulnerable by cross-gender interactions, not the intrinsic tapu state of one gender or another.

As a consequence of these considerations, childbirth was marked with considerable ritual. As soon as a woman delivered, she and the baby were painted all over with turmeric (*enga*). Repeatedly encountered in life crises, turmeric warmed and enlivened mother and child, and increased the mother's milk (Gifford 1929: 185). Turmeric's yellow-orange colour formerly belonged to the red colour classification (*kulokula*), the mana colour, and painting the skin red reflected a desire to imbue the body with mana. The postnatal rite consisted of the 'ulumotu'a (senior head of the 'api household) cutting the umbilicus with a woodworking adze (*toki*), and offering up a prayer that a boy might become a great warrior or fisherman, a girl a beautiful mother (Collocott 1921: 419–20). Ritual cutting with an adze (rather than the bamboo knife normally used for surgery) was symbolically charged: the *toki* was a significant object in Tonga, and the cosmogonic myth describes the god Tangaloa creating the archipelago by scattering woodchips from his workshop into the ocean (Ve'ehala and Fanua 1977). Cutting was primordial creativity. The umbilicus was the conduit by which antenatal vitality was imparted, and its severance began the baby's reliance on its own breath (*mānava*). As in other Polynesian cultures, the umbilicus was buried in a little tumulus outside the house (Gifford 1929: 185–86). Mother and child were secluded for five days and prohibited from bathing. For the first 10 days, the mother ate

only yams and hot coconut milk. Daily washing and repainting with turmeric continued for two months, until the baby was considered strong enough to be moved (Gifford 1929: 185–86, 191).

Puberty rites

Although celebrated, the first menstruation rendered a girl relationally tapu to those around her, and her mother secluded her in bed until the period ended, painting her daily with turmeric and forbidding her to bathe lest the flow cease. Bathing in a chiefly pool was also a common source of episodic tapu, and therefore the body's lower orifices must have been permeable to episodic tapu like the mouth. At the end of the treatment, a postmenopausal relative took the girl to bathe with aromatic herbs, which released her tapu state (Gifford 1929: 186–87). First menstruation therefore required similar treatments of seclusion, painting and no bathing as childbirth, and we can hypothesise that expulsions from the vulva drained the *manava* system. That said, avoiding bathing to prevent the period stopping prematurely shows that the blood flow was an integral part of her tapu seclusion, and must be fully completed.

When boys first showed pubic hair, the rite of supercision was organised for a cohort of similar age. All males except the Tu'i Tonga underwent supercision, and boys who refused were no longer permitted to eat with the household or touch anyone's food—a clear indication that they also became relationally tapu at puberty. Supercision was performed by cutting the foreskin longitudinally along the top of the glans, opening it with an action sign readable as a release of the penis' tapu closure. Afterwards, the boys were bandaged and secluded together in a house for five days under strict tapu conditions against bathing, eating anything sweet or red, drinking more than one cup of water a day, walking or working. On the sixth day, the boys similarly took a tapu-releasing bath (*kaukautapu*) in the sea (Gifford 1929: 187–89). Against a view of the genders or genitals as either categorically *ngofua* or tapu, puberty rites show that adolescence rendered boys and girls temporarily relationally tapu until the completion of genital bleeding, food observances and the tapu-releasing bath. Perhaps modelled on the rite of first menstruation, supercision constituted what Bloch (1992: 4) defined as a sublimated act of rebounding violence against

the initiand; a cosmologically necessary trauma which reasserted the normative system of relational tapu based on genealogical location (Hanson 1982: 335).

Otherwise short-haired, pre-Christian Tongan children wore a long lock of hair (*fangafanga* for girls, *tope* for boys) on one temple. For girls, this indexed hymen integrity, and was cut off at marriage unless they had had sex beforehand. For boys, the *tope* was cut off after the *kaukautapu* to indicate their classificatory adulthood. The maternity, birth and puberty rites consequently demonstrate a structuralist scheme-transfer, wherein ritual action signs of bleeding and cutting created a symbolic equivalence between the navel's umbilicus, the head's lock, the penis' foreskin, the vulva's menstrual blood and hymen as a class of parallel bodily exuviae on the vertical plane of bodily symmetry. These analogous transformational bleeds and cuts reveal the systemic interconnection of the head, navel and genitals as the upper, central and lower orifices of the *manava* system. Naturally or artificially induced bleeds and cutting, seclusion and bathing transformed the classification of individuals and released them from relationally tapu states (Gell 1993: 82–95; Turner 1974). Only at life crises, in fact, could relational tapu could be altered.

Tatatau and tokolosi

Another rite of passage featuring extensive bloodletting was the tattooing (*tatatau*) of young men, which began shortly after puberty. Missionary activity suppressed Tongan *tatatau* in the mid-nineteenth century, although it was universally practiced on men beforehand. Men were not deemed fully adult, and were spurned by women, until their *tatatau* was complete (Vason 1840: 179–80). Like the Samoan *pe'a*, *tatatau* covered the hips, lower belly, buttocks, thighs and (sometimes) the genitals (Labillardiere 1800; Mallon 2010). Alfred Gell (1993: 87–95) argued that Samoan *tatau* wrapped the young man's increasingly mana and tapu genitals, and subordinated his will to the kin group. Because the Tongan puberty rites discussed above indicate temporary relational tapu developing at puberty, and then being released, we can infer that male genitalia were not generally considered tapu, and therefore *tatatau* cannot readily be explained on this basis. As in weapon engraving and barkcloth painting, the iconography of Tongan *tatatau* predominantly replicated abstracted weaving motifs (Mills 2008: 301–306). Like the fine

waist-mats worn over the same body area on formal occasions, *tatatau* can therefore be read as expressing the wearer's respectful location of themselves within the social network (Herda 1999; Sahlins 1985: 85–87). Furthermore, the wrapping of people and objects in textiles historically instantiated and insulated divine or chiefly presences throughout Oceania (Hooper 2002; Kuechler 1999). I therefore view *tatatau* as an art that insulated and energised the wearer's abdominal *manava* system through textile replication and transformative tapu-releasing bloodletting.

The male genital bloodletting technique of *tokolosi* is also illuminating. *Tokolosi* was practiced in Tonga and Fiji to cure tetanus, internal bleeding caused by abdominal wounds, and (in a lesser form) 'general languor and inactivity of the system' (Martin 1818: 392–94). These three conditions have seemingly unrelated symptoms unless considered with reference to the *manava* system. The shaking, lockjaw and spasms of tetanus, abdominal wounds near the liver and a general lack of vitality can all be viewed as dysfunctions in the *manava* system. In its minor form, the procedure involved the insertion of a reed catheter into the penile urethra as far as the perineum, causing pain and profuse bleeding. In more serious cases of tetanus and abdominal wounds, a doubled-over cord was then inserted into the urethra through this reed, the perineum and urethra pierced with a knife and the end of the cord drawn out through the incision. The reed was removed, and the cord periodically drawn back and forth to reinitiate the bleeding. Penile-perineal bloodletting aimed to regulate dysfunctions in the *manava* system, and presumably because the penis possessed a categorical expelling association. Although mana's redness throughout Polynesia surely derives from blood, the ritual significance of bloodletting in pre-Christian Tonga has been underemphasised. For example, many ailments are still treated herbally in traditional Tongan medicine as accumulations of 'bad blood' (*fakatoto kovi*) resulting from the displeasure of deceased ancestors (George 1995: 30)—interpretable as a latter-day variation of post-mortem *manahi*. Bleeding, therefore, although synonymous with relational tapu events of the life cycle, was specifically a mechanism of their resolution and passage. By rebalancing the *manava*, it reasserted the *ngofua* conditions of ordinary life and structural relations.

Death rites

The *hou'eiki* (chiefly class) were widely thought to possess immortal souls whereas *tu'a* (commoners) did not (Collocott 1921). Commoners were buried in the bush with little ceremony and funerary rites were largely concerned with the relational tapu of chiefs. In death as in eating, the entire body of a more *'eiki* person became relationally tapu (Gifford 1929: 196). Touching a corpse produced an episodic tapu in the hands, but an un-releasable 10-month episodic tapu resulted from handling the corpse of a high chief. To avoid this contagion, those attending the body were forbidden from approaching the head and sat facing the deceased's feet (Gifford 1929: 199). High chiefs appointed specialist *matāpule* heralds as undertakers (*ha'atufunga*) to oversee their funerals; even for them, handling the corpse occasioned their contracting the *nima tapu* (hand tapu), which prevented them from feeding themselves for five, 10 or 15 days, depending on the deceased's rank (Gifford 1929: 197).

When a man died, his children's heads were shaved. When a chief died, all those he governed singed off their hair. When the Tu'i Tonga died, all Tongans shaved their heads (Gifford 1929: 199). These acts of haircutting also coincided with ritual bloodletting. An almost universal feature of high chiefly funerals was *foa'ulu*, mass self-mutilation of the head: men beat their scalps with clubs or cut them with knives, pierced their cheeks with spears, or scoured them with abrasives until they bled (Martin 1818: 349–50; Valeri 1989). In the puberty rites and *tatau*, bleeding released relational tapu associated with an individual's classificatory maturation and haircutting marked that maturation's attainment. Logically, therefore, the haircutting and head-wounding of chiefly funerals equally released the relational tapu incumbent upon men due to their classificatory elevation through the superior's death.

Foa'ulu was never performed at the funeral of the Tu'i Tonga, which suggests that he possessed a different ontological status to all other *hou'eiki*. One might suggest that, like his apical ancestor Aho'eitu, he was not viewed as categorically alive or dying in the normal sense, and therefore his inferiors did not undergo the same hierarchical elevation. Replacing this bloodletting in the funerary rites of the Tu'i Tonga, a remarkable ritual phase occurred immediately after interment. For 15 nights, more than 60 male mourners defecated on

the royal tomb. At sunrise each morning, female mourners approached the burial mound with baskets and shells, and removed the faeces. Martin wrote: 'to demonstrate their great veneration for the high character of Toootonga ... it was the duty of the most exalted nobles ... to perform [these] ... offices, rather than the sacred ground, in which he was buried should remain polluted' (1818: 352–53). The Tu'i Tonga's interment rendered the burial mound itself tapu, and only an act of mass ritual defecation could achieve its release. Faeces became a powerfully *ngofua* ritual substance by emerging exhausted from the *manava* system.³

The foregoing data reveal a set of ritual action signs materially instantiating ontological change through interaction with the *manava* system: bloodletting, haircutting, painting with turmeric, the proscription and prescription of bathing, and seclusion in multiples of five days. These practices transformed categorical identities, ranks and relational tapu statuses, and stand in a higher scalar relationship to the phenomena and treatment of everyday episodic tapu. They also show that the crown, mouth, throat, heart, liver, navel, genitals and anus shared nodal functions within a substantially tubular anatomical model, with which all states of episodic and relational tapu, and all activities of their release, were directly concerned.

Mana, class identity and chiefly interaction

Bridging the ontological gap between divine and human status, incumbent Tongan chiefs were ideologically positioned as the conduit of divine mana and fertility for the district and population they governed (Biersack 1990: 48; Kaeppler 1999: 36; Latukefu 1974: 1–3; Sahlins 1985: 78–103). Both mana and 'eiki were inferred by historical Tongans from the vitality, good nourishment and sexual potency, courage, agency and authority of individuals. Although mana and *manava* are not linguistically related, therefore, the performative qualities of 'eiki strongly correlate with both mana and great, resilient *manava* (Bott 1982; Gifford 1929: 124; Marcus 1980: 18, 1989; Sahlins 1985: 47, 50).

3 Similar ritual practices occurred elsewhere in Polynesia: at the conclusion of the investiture rite of an *ari'i rahi* in the Society Islands, for example, members of the Arioi society performed ritual urination and defecation on his body to release his extremely tapu status (Claessen 2000: 723).

The entanglement of tapu with ingestion and digestive processes through *manava* made foodways central to the performance of class identity, and determined both commensality and food tapu. There was a relational tapu on anyone eating in the sight of superiors (or watching them eat). In the 1770s, James Cook observed that seldom were more than two or three Tongans of any class found eating together; on one occasion, Cook invited two high-ranking chiefs aboard HMS *Resolution* for lunch. In his superior's presence, the lesser chief 'would not sit down and eat before him, but ... got to the other end of the table and sat and ate with his back towards him' (Beaglehole 1988, II: 253; Collocott 1921: 423). Termed *kaitafoki*, this technique shielded the inferior's open mouth from the superior's gaze and prevented an episodic tapu from entering his *manava* system. Relatedly, when the Tu'i Tonga ate, only his tapu-immune foreign *matāpule* could serve him, while all Tongans had to face the opposite direction or contract an episodic tapu (Beaglehole 1988, III: 880). Like the radiant influence of the vulva discussed above, the Tu'i Tonga's open mouth exposed any viewer to the dangerous *manava* inside him. Evidently, the mouth and eye both disseminated episodic tapu states to less chiefly individuals and contracted them from more chiefly individuals. The belief that the chiefly mouth and gaze had a radiant debilitating capacity at distance closely paralleled *manahi*, if they were not the same phenomenon. The body's susceptibility to this broadcast relational tapu also explains the requirement that commoners strip down to the waist and expose their belly to any chief as they passed (Vason 1840: 162): exposure of the abdomen invited an episodic tapu if any cause existed, and can be read as public submission to the embodied ideological mechanism.

Elite commensality became most socially charged through the royal kava ceremony, Tonga's highest political rite. In this enduring ceremony, the seating position and drinking order of chiefly titleholders in the circle above the kava bowl directly reflects their relative rank. Traditionally, people of intermediate *mua* class sat below the bowl, while *tu'a* commoners merely looked on from outside the building, behind the *mua*. It is a powerful indication of the cultural legacy of the *manava* system that the Tongan nation's highest political ceremony still inscribes the hierarchical organisation of the nobility through a succession of public consumption acts. Given the historical danger of mutually observed chiefly consumption, the ceremony's performative

representation of the aristocratic hierarchy is made possible only by the uniquely *ngofua* quality of kava, which could never be rendered tapu (Biersack 1991; Martin 1818: 355).

The consumption of meat was rigidly controlled by species as an expression of class hierarchy. The domesticated meat species (pig, dog, chicken) were relationally tapu to Tongan commoners, who acquired animal protein from rats, fish and shellfish (Beaglehole 1988, III: 169). The most prestigious marine prey (bonito, shark and turtle) were also relationally tapu to commoners, and many minor chiefs did not consider themselves *'eiki* enough to consume turtle (Bataille-Benguigui 1988; Martin 1818: 312). Among the *hou'eiki* themselves, hierarchical size preference also existed, so that larger pigs, bonito or sharks were passed upwards for consumption at an appropriate rank (Gifford 1929: 102–108).⁴

Unlike the genealogically articulated episodic-relational tapu system discussed above, (class: species) relational food tapu restrictions appropriated resources cultivated and husbanded by commoners for elite consumption, and were profoundly ideological. Superficially *appearing* to be the same phenomena because their episodic outcomes were the same, class-based relational tapu differed significantly from those of the *kainga*, and those between members of the *hou'eiki*. While kinship-based relational tapu were relationship-specific and (over a lifetime) zero-sum, class-based prohibitions alienated *tu'a* labour power to privilege the *hou'eiki*.

Class identities universalised and mapped the *'eiki-tu'a* dimension onto society, rendering the *hou'eiki* relationally tapu to all lower classes and necessitating complex genealogical calculations of relative rank within their own interactions too (Korn 1978). As Phyllis Herda (1987) discusses, these genealogical calculations were driven by the cosmological concept of relative *sino'i'eiki* (chiefiness in body) between chiefly individuals, a value of proximal descent from the god Tangaloa. Herda therefore characterises two opposed rank constructions: *kainga rank* (those asymmetries articulating relational tapu) and *sino'i'eiki rank*. Framed in terms of the archaeology of cosmology, *'eiki* anciently

4 In war, human meat was occasionally consumed, but only from those of lower rank than the consumer (Lawry 1850). Where individuals of lower classificatory rank did kill and consume higher-status enemies without seeming consequences, this was read as an indicator of the victor's previously unrecognised mana.

amounted to Herda's *kainga rank*. Due to a woman's superiority to her brothers and inferiority to her husband, the 'eiki-tu'a dichotomy which rendered individuals within the 'api relationally tapu to one another, and dated back to the Ancestral Polynesian Period, also ranked 'api within each *kainga* asymmetrically. Over many generations, this inevitably generated complex chains of pyramidal hierarchy between *kainga*, articulated by relational tapu at every link. The crystallisation of that pyramid into a set of stratified and ontologically distinct classes was not inevitable, however, and beliefs that the *hou'eiki* alone possessed immortal souls due to Tangaloan ancestry, relational tapu on animal foods, and class endogamy, were key ideological components instantiating those differences.

During the sixteenth century, instabilities in the Tu'i Tonga succession led to the rise of *hingoa fakanofu* (invested name) titles that recognised authority (*pule*) and great capability (*ivilahi*) as the primary traits of 'eiki (Campbell 2001; Marcus 1980: 15–19). This decreasing significance of *sino'i'eiki* as a source of authority is relevant here. Because class-based relational tapu applied equally to all members of the *hou'eiki*, many of them occasioned relational tapu in other classes without the underpinning cosmological legitimacy of divine ancestry. By eliding *sino'i'eiki*, the causal interconnection of classificatory 'eiki with relational tapu and *manava's* vulnerability formed a compelling, embodied class system well into the early nineteenth century, despite fundamental changes in the genealogy of kingship. Indeed, this elision created further opportunities for ideological redeployment.

Regulatory tapu

A key example of this is regulatory tapu, the third heuristic subtype discussed here. Although they were class-based relational tapu phenomena in their influence and episodic outcomes, regulatory tapu were not universal legisigns emerging from the interaction of immutable class identities. Instead, they operationalised relational tapu conditions as manipulable sinsigns of their own distinct law. Regulatory tapu encompasses cases where the *hou'eiki* could (at will) impose relational tapu states on activities or food resources as a means of social control. For example, to avoid famine resulting from food presentations associated with public events such as the *Inasi*

(New Yam Harvest Ceremony), chiefly marriages, funerals or diplomatic visits, a chief's *matāpule* or priest would place regulatory tapu on the slaughter of certain animals, the crops of certain plantations, or fishing in certain bays. They were generally marked by the suspension of a woven pandanus shark-effigy from a prominent tree (the *taungatapu* or tapu anchor) with the implication that any transgressor would be eaten the next time they bathed (Gifford 1929: 343–44; Martin 1818: 353–54). Although regulatory tapu was often good local governance, it fundamentally departed from the genealogically articulated rationality of domestic relational tapu, and the universality of influence demonstrated by class-based relational tapu.

Discussion

The *manava* system was an embodying cornerstone of pre-Christian cosmology in Tonga, and greatly facilitates explanations of traditional medicine, interpersonal interaction and ritual practice. Through the body's permeability and exchange processes, the *manava* system provided the physiological mechanism of episodic tapu, which was articulated by relational tapu conditions arising from asymmetrical rank between individuals in a kin group, between individuals of different classes, and between individuals and resources over which the elite exerted ideological control. Tapu therefore emerges as an operant principle that articulated status asymmetry through the bodily vulnerability of *manava*'s downwards flow through a tubular torso. In the case of senior kin, and the *hou'eiki*, the danger of higher status was not limited to touch or ingestion, but radiated out from their gaze, open mouth or simple displeasure.

Mana had a complex relationship with tapu and chiefly in historical Tonga because the nature of *'eiki* itself has undergone radical transformations over the last 3,000 years; because the cosmological properties, physical impact and ritual management of tapu conditions have adapted in different ways as a response to those transformations; because mana and chiefly were distinct but mutually influencing personal qualities; and because the sociocultural system documented in the eighteenth century was an uneven accretion of these transforming traditions. Mediated by its complex relationship with *'eiki*, mana became a somatic reality for pre-Christian Tongans through the

embodying mechanism of relational tapu's influence on the *manava*. This mana-'eiki-tapu-*manava* triple-articulation physicalised the metaphysical and conjugated the sociostructural with the divine. In turn, the bodily interconnection of mana and tapu rendered them both susceptible to the ritual action signs enumerated here.

Within the 'api and wider *kainga*, the ancient hegemonic principles of the classless Ancestral Polynesian kin group achieved historical stability through the ephemeral and zero-sum nature of its subordination. The *hou'eiki* class-alterity construct of divine descent from Tangaloa (which defined *sino'i'eiki*) abstracted and reified the domestic construct of relative and ephemeral 'eiki (before the twelfth century CE) into an effective ideological superstructure underpinning a stable class system (Korn 1978; Mahina 1990). Dominant for several centuries, this tapu-embodied stratification itself went through further transformations between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, which diminished the role of divine descent in the mediation of mana's equivalence to chiefness and relational tapu, and rendered the tapu system a subtle and effective mechanism of socioeconomic regulation. Chiefly persons and things were not simply mana and therefore tapu in pre-Christian Tonga; rather, tapu emerged from a historical succession of dependently abstracted chiefness constructs, each possessing a distinct and indirect relationship with mana.

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