

11

Mana for a New Age

Rachel Morgain

From chakra healing to African drumming, sweat lodges to shamanic journeys, New Age movements, particularly in North America, are notorious for their pattern of appropriating concepts and practices from other spiritual traditions. While continental Native American and Asian influences are perhaps most familiar as sourcing grounds for New Age material, the traditions of Pacific Islanders, particularly Hawaiians, have not escaped New Age attention. In particular, the movement known as 'Huna' has introduced Hawaiian-sounding words and concepts to the New Age vocabulary. Chief among these is the concept of 'mana', controversially subsumed within what is often a large laundry list of non-western religious and philosophical nomenclature, under the generic category of 'energy' or 'life force'. Continually adapted through succeeding generations of Huna teachings, and further adopted into sections of the related contemporary Pagan movement through the tradition known as 'Ferī', the concept of 'mana' displays some consistent themes across these traditions, quite different from its meaning in Hawaiian contexts. In being adopted into these movements, it has been transformed to fit within a field of ideas that have developed in western esoteric traditions from at least the late eighteenth century.

In this chapter, I trace some of the ideas that have come to be attached to the concept of mana through several iterations of New Age movements in North America. Beginning with the foundational

works of Max Freedom Long, I look at the spiritual practice known as Huna, popularised from the late 1930s through a series of Long's texts and his Huna Research organisation. I then go on to examine how these ideas have been developed in the works of one of Huna's most influential contemporary teachers, Serge 'Kahili' King, who not only substantially expanded the conceptual vocabulary connected with the notion of mana in Huna, but whose spiritual and healing methods have been 're'-introduced into Hawai'i through sites such as the Kalani Retreat Center, located on the island of Hawai'i. Finally, I explore how mana has been adopted into the contemporary Pagan movement through the tradition known as Anderson Feri.

Feri tradition, created by Victor and Cora Anderson in California during the middle decades of the twentieth century, drew on ideas drawn from Huna including the concept of mana as it had been written about by Long. As an orally transmitted tradition, Feri concepts and practices are potentially subject to many sometimes contradictory interpretations among those from different lineages, taught by different teachers, or by the same teachers at different times, suggesting that there is likely to be no single, unified understanding of mana within Feri. My research here focuses on interviews with a group of Feri practitioners in San Francisco who also have ties to the closely related Reclaiming movement, with whom I have a long-standing research relationship. While their ideas may be idiosyncratic in some respects compared with other Feri lineages, certain threads can nevertheless be identified in how mana is understood and spoken about that are consistent with Huna ideas, pointing to a widespread adoption of particular conceptions of mana across New Age and contemporary Pagan movements. Here, I trace these ideas back to cosmological conceptions that have a long genealogy within western esoteric traditions, particularly since the work of Franz Mesmer in the late eighteenth century and that of the Theosophical Society established in the later decades of the nineteenth century.

Max Freedom Long and Huna

'Mana' entered the New Age movement primarily through the spiritual practice known as Huna, the invention of white American teacher and writer Max Freedom Long. Long claimed to have met with the Curator

(later Director) of the Bishop Museum in Honolulu, William Brigham, suggesting Brigham was the main source of his insights on Hawaiian tradition. Long worked as a teacher on the island of Hawai'i from 1917 to 1920. According to the historical work of Makana Risser Chai, who has examined the evidence of Long's time in Honolulu, assessing his claims for the 'Hawaiian' roots of his system of Huna, he arrived in Honolulu some time in late 1920 or early 1921, making a bare living working in a photographic shop (Chai 2011: 104). From his earliest time there, he spent his spare time trying to talk to as many people as he could, learning what he could of Hawaiian life. Chai quotes a personal correspondence with author and former researcher at the Bishop Museum, Pali Jae Lee, who suggests, 'Every moment he could get away from work and try to find something out from someone, he did so' (quoted in Chai 2011: 115). In the process, he tried to find a kahuna who would share secrets with him, to no avail.¹

After returning to the mainland United States from 1939 to 1941, Long wrote a number of mystery novels set in Hawai'i, drawing from his experiences and his rich imagination. But from the mid-1930s, he also wrote a series of books on Huna claiming knowledge of 'ancient Hawaiian secrets'. Pali Jae Lee, in research conducted in the 1970s, carefully traced Brigham's personal journals over the period of Long's residence in Honolulu. As she demonstrates, from the man who kept a detailed account 'even to the lists and receipts of groceries he purchased, the laundry he sent out and received back', there is no note of Brigham ever having met with or spoken to Long (Lee 2007: 92). As Chai suggests, based on Brigham's character and his consciousness of his superior class, it is highly unlikely he would ever have deigned to meet with Long, and less so that he would have taken in Long as a student (Chai 2011: 105). Nor are the stories Long shares in his works, which he claimed to have sourced from Brigham, reflected in Brigham's writings (Chai 2011: 106–108).

Interestingly, Chai suggests that it is possible Long may have nevertheless had some legitimate sources for his writings on Hawai'i. In particular, she points to the role of Lahilahi Webb, a Hawaiian woman from a chiefly family, who had participated in the coronation

1 This is hardly surprising given Long's brief time in Hawai'i and status as an outsider, and, as Lee points out, even less so considering the climate of fear, suspicion and legal prohibitions against use of the Hawaiian language and culture among Kanaka Maoli at this time (Lee 2007: 90).

of Kalakaua and served as lady-in-waiting and nurse to Queen Lili'uokalani. During the period of Long's stay in Honolulu, Webb worked as a guide in the Bishop Museum, and met Long during his visits there. Webb was so respected during her time at the museum that she became the informant of many of its resident scholars. Webb was a source of much information on Hawaiian traditions, including on healing, traditional wisdom and kahuna. However, according to museum workers interviewed by Pali Jae Lee, she was also inclined to 'tell the haole lots of foolishness' (Chai 2011: 116). Chai suggests that it is possible that Webb was the source of many of the stories Long attributed to Brigham, which she describes as 'relatively accurate descriptions of Hawaiian traditions' albeit containing some errors, possibly as a result of 'little jokes [Webb] played on him' (Chai 2011: 116).

Despite these sometimes accurate depictions dotting Long's work, Long left Hawai'i with little more in source material for his Huna system than these few stories and the 'old Hawaiian dictionary' of Lorrin Andrews, which he pored over intently to glean from it what he could (Long 1981: 38; see also Lee 2007: 92, for a critique of Long's dictionary method of learning about Hawaiian concepts). The most sympathetic Hawaiian account, from scholar and Living Treasure of Hawai'i Charles Kenn, highlights the limitations of a genuinely Hawaiian influence in Long's work. Kenn was a friend and long-time correspondent of Long, who spent some time as one of his Huna Research Associates (HRA) in Los Angeles in the late 1940s. In 1949, having returned to Hawai'i, he wrote in a letter to a member of the HRA that, 'I have no doubt about Long's sincerity, but he may have introduced some non-huna factors on account of his white-man's mind' (Chai 2011: 109). Ten years later, he wrote to his friend, author and scholar Leinani Melville Jones, that 'Max Long was "*auana*" [to stray morally or mentally]. I too cannot swallow his "*huna*" stuff, and I told him so ... Max means well but, being a *haole* ... is unable to comprehend the inner meaning of the kahuna philosophy' (quoted in Rodman 1979: 131).

Far from being able to learn of Hawaiian spiritual traditions, which it seems he originally hoped to do, in the end the Huna method that Long developed was a western esoteric system dressed up with a few Hawaiian terms and some scattered stories and imagery. He drew his core ideas almost wholesale from the traditions of

early twentieth-century spiritualism, and in particular those of the Theosophical Society, with whom he had trained prior to his time in Hawai'i (Long 1981: 1). Other western philosophies that pervaded the intellectual landscape of the early twentieth century can also be traced in Long's writings. In particular, Long introduced a concept of 'three selves', which he claimed as part of kahuna lore, but which instead drew clear influences from Freudian psychology:

The 'unihipili' (akin to Freud's id), which he describes as the 'low or animal spirit in us' which 'has inferior powers of reason'

The 'uhane' or 'conscious mind spirit' (akin to Freud's ego), which 'cannot remember for itself but can use the full power of inductive reasoning'

The 'aumakua' (akin to Freud's superego), which he describes as the 'superconscious' or 'parental spirit', the 'oldest and most highly evolved of men's three spirit selves' (Long 1954: 47).²

In *The Key to Theosophy*, Helena Blavatsky had written in 1889 that the consciousness is comprised of four components: the Lower or Personal Ego, including 'animal instincts, passions, desires, etc.'; the Inner Ego or 'permanent *Individuality*'; the Spiritual Soul; and the Higher Self or 'inseparable ray of the Universal' (Blavatsky 2006: 99). In Long's model, Blavatsky's latter two selves were merged into the 'aumakua' or 'superconscious', which takes on a more Freudian flavour in his somewhat supercilious notion of a 'parental spirit'. Thus Long adapted these Theosophical notions into a tripartite model of the self (remoulding them in a way that more closely resembles Sigmund Freud's framework); he lent each aspect a Hawaiian name, but retained an essentially Theosophical underpinning.³

2 Mary Pukui Kawena and Samuel H. Elbert's Hawaiian dictionary give the following translation of these terms:

'unihi.pili: Spirit of a dead person, sometimes believed present in bones or hair of the deceased and kept lovingly (Pukui and Elbert 1986: 372)

'uhane: Soul, spirit, ghost (363)

'au.makua: Family or personal gods, deified ancestors who might assume the shape of sharks ... owls ... hawks ... [other forms listed] (32).

3 Indeed, Freud's ideas themselves were heavily influenced by the ferment of spiritualism in the late nineteenth century, and by the practices of Mesmerism, which served as a precursor to both Theosophy and psychoanalytic theory (Crews 1996).

The concept of mana in Huna

The concept of mana as elaborated by Long likewise has its roots in Theosophy. Blavatsky had earlier identified the word Prana with the notion of 'life or vital principle': "'Prana," or "Life," is, strictly speaking, the radiating force or Energy of Atma [the Universal Life]—ITS lower or rather (in its effects) more physical, because manifesting, aspect. Prana or Life permeates the whole being of the objective Universe' (Blavatsky 2006: 99). Opening a discussion on mana, Long writes:

In the psycho-religions, both ancient and modern (with the exception of Huna) there is little to be found that gives us a clear idea of the POWER that turns the wheels of life or that moves the machinery of prayer ...

In the beliefs of India, much is said of *prana* (which may have been an idea drawn from a source similar to that from which Huna was drawn). Prana was held up as a tool of value in the early Theosophical writings ... The shining example of a force of this kind was found in the legendary 'serpent force' supposedly rising at the base of the spine in response to certain exercises ... and rising in spirals along the spine until the top of the head was reached. There the force caused the 'open consciousness' and one 'saw God' ... I spent several months trying to get proof of these mechanisms when young and a member of the [Theosophical Society]. I also tried for some years to find any person who gave evidence of having learned to arouse and use this force, but without success. (Long 1981: 1)

It is this 'vital force' or essence of life that Long identifies as mana in his writings.

Images of flowing water are often used to express his understanding of mana. In one of Long's most influential works, *The Secret Science Behind Miracles*, he states:

They [kahunas] knew the force as a thing which had to do with all thought processes and bodily activity. It was the essence of life itself. The kahuna symbol for this force was water. Water flows, so does the vital force. Water fills things. So does the vital force. Water may leak away—so may vital force. (Long 1954: 31)

In this context, then, mana is something that exists within the natural world, independent of the human activity that might direct it or express it. It has a pseudo-substantive quality, with the capacity to flow, fill up or leak away.

As with the spiritualist traditions of the nineteenth century, this 'flow' is also often described in metaphors of electricity and magnetism:

We suppose that gravity is akin to magnetism, and that magnetism is to be found where there is a current of an electrical nature ... The kahunas recognised the magnetic and the opposite, repulsive, nature of vital force or motricity but, unfortunately, they left no detailed exposition of the subject. (Long 1954: 31)

Developing this electromagnetic imagery further, Long suggests that mana has three levels or 'voltages', which connect with and operate through the three selves:

The vital force or mana of the kahunas has three strengths. If it is electrical in nature, as modern experiments have demonstrated, we may safely say that the three strengths of mana known to the kahunas equal three voltages.

The kahuna words for the three voltages were mana, for the low voltage used by the subconscious spirit, and mana-mana for the higher voltage used by the conscious spirit as 'will' or hypnotic force. There was a still higher voltage known as mana-loa⁴ or 'strongest force,' and this was thought to be used only by a superconscious spirit associated with the two lesser spirits to complete the triune man. (Long 1954: 52)

The popularity of electromagnetic imagery in spiritual traditions reflects a nineteenth century cross-fertilisation of language between the emerging sciences of electromagnetism and spiritualist ideas, which trace back at least to Franz Mesmer's notions of 'animal magnetism': what he thought of as a universal, permeating magnetic fluid. By the twentieth century, many like Long with interests in the esoteric viewed themselves as engaged in experiments aimed at establishing the scientific basis for their ideas about such a universal, potent substance, now often referred to as 'vital force', and described these ideas in language borrowed heavily from these sciences.

4 Pukui and Elbert include mana.mana as a reduplicated form of mana; no form of mana loa is recognised among their translations; loa translates as: distance, length, height; distant, long, tall, far, permanent (Pukui and Elbert 1986: 236, 209).

Despite its quality as a universal substance, the implications of recognising this substance in New Age movements centre largely around the person, and in particular the individual, who is able to engage with this force to transform her- or himself. A great deal of Long's writings are dedicated to what he describes as processes of 'accumulating a good surcharge of mana and sending it to the High Self' for healing, personal goals or other purposes (Long 1981: 38). The psychoanalytically oriented three-part self points to Huna's focus as a spirituality of self-transformation, a fact that highlights one of the most important points of departure in how mana has come to be understood within New Age movements: that it is primarily about individual transformation, a source of power from within.

Building on the base of Long's writings, many authors from the continental United States have expanded upon the tradition of Huna and core concepts such as mana. Chief among these contemporary proponents of Huna is Serge 'Kahili' King, a prolific writer and teacher of Huna in New Age workshops, including in Hawai'i. King is Anglo-American and a former student of Long's, who claims to have been adopted into the Hawaiian Kahili family by his Hawaiian teacher (King 1992), although this has been disputed (K.L. Walker 2005). He describes Huna as 'the Polynesian philosophy and practice of effective living' (King n.d.), demonstrating the way in which the ideas of Huna fit with the broader New Age movement in focusing first and foremost on self-improvement of the individual. This individualisation is clear in the 'seven principles' of Huna identified by King, and widely listed among authors of Huna books and websites. These are:

1. **IKE** – the world is what you think it is
2. **KALA** – there are no limits, everything is possible
3. **MAKIA** – energy flows where attention goes
4. **MANAWA** – now is the moment of power
5. **ALOHA** – to love is to be happy with

6. **MANA** – all power comes from within
7. **PONO** – effectiveness is the measure of truth (King 2009: 53–57).⁵

By the twenty-first century, these principles were being reproduced in images posted on the Facebook page of the Kalani Retreat Center, which claims to be ‘the largest retreat center in Hawai’i’ (Kalani 2010). In the poster for the sixth principle, ‘Mana: All power comes from within’, the words are superimposed upon an image of a woman holding a yoga pose on a cliff overlooking the ocean. Kalani is a well-loved destination for yoga, wellness, and Hawaiian culture, personal retreats, and volunteer vacations. In 2011, the centre ran a Huna workshop, which was promoted as follows:

According to the ancient Hawaiian Huna philosophy, all illness is a result of stress. Modern medical research continues to prove this relationship—linking stress to everything from high blood pressure to weight gain. If you know how to relieve tension, the body’s healing energy can flow and you can achieve ‘instant healing.’ This workshop reveals ancient secrets to managing stress as well as the latest information on achieving optimal health. (Kalani 2011)⁶

5 Pukui and Elbert give the following translations for these terms:

‘ike: To see, know, feel, greet, recognize, perceive, experience, be aware, understand; to know sexually; to receive revelations from the gods; knowledge, awareness, understanding, recognition, comprehension and hence learning; sense, as of hearing or sight; sensory, perceptive, vision. (Pukui and Elbert 1986: 96)

kala: To loosen, untie, free, release, remove, unburden, absolve, let go, acquit, take off, undo; to proclaim, announce; to forgive, pardon, excuse; ... prayer to free one from any evil influence (120)

mā.kia: Aim, motto, purpose; to aim or strive for, to concentrate on (229)

manawa: Time, turn, season, date, chronology, period of time (237)

aloha: Aloha, love, affection, compassion, mercy, sympathy, pity, kindness, sentiment, grace, charity ... (21)

mana: Supernatural or divine power, mana, miraculous power; a powerful nation, authority; to give mana to, to make powerful; to have mana, power, authority; authorization, privilege; miraculous, divinely powerful, spiritual; possessed of mana (235)

pono: Goodness, uprightness, morality, moral qualities, correct or proper procedure, excellence, well-being, prosperity, welfare, benefit, behalf, equity, sake, true condition or nature, duty; ... in perfect order, accurate, correct, eased, relieved; should, ought, must, necessary (340).

6 The fee for the workshop was over \$US2,000, although this included accommodations, meals and use of the resort’s luxury accommodations.

The focus on physical and psychological healing through allowing the body's healing energy to flow, and the idea that the concept of mana tells us that 'all power comes from within', points critically to how the focus on individual transformation in New Age settings likewise individualises the concept of mana.

At the same time, mana, for King, as for other Huna authors, exists objectively within the natural order of the cosmos. Building on the experiments in orgone energy conducted by followers of Wilhelm Reich,⁷ King elaborated methods for measuring and collecting mana, using objects known as manaplates and manaboxes. His work in this field began in the early 1970s, and although he claims his ideas stemmed from visiting West Africa and 'studying the life force that some Africans call mungo', it is telling that around this time he also began studying the works of Reich (King 1999), whose unusual psychological theories gained traction with esoteric and alternative spiritual movements in the 1970s (Clifton 2006: 62–64). King describes how he learnt to build plates that give off 'energy' from metal sheets such as copper and insulating material such as acrylic. Although he experimented with different shapes and arrangements, he describes his breakthrough in this area in interspersing the metal and insulating material. He likens these to a capacitor, with more folds or layers increasing the charge (King 1992: 70–71). By using these to construct plates, boxes or other shapes, he suggests, it is possible to build devices that sharpen razor blades, clarify and purify water, charge batteries and provide physical and spiritual healing (King 1992: 72–83). As with Long's writings, these early experiments of King's reveal a concept of mana as a cosmic energy, understood through electrical metaphors of charge, voltage and capacitance.

King's later writings reflect a growing awareness of the critiques of such a concept of 'mana' being subsumed alongside other non-western concepts under the generic rubric of life force. Perhaps influenced by emergent anthropological critiques of earlier conceptions of mana in ethnographic writings, particularly that of Roger Keesing (1984), in 1992 King wrote:

7 Orgone was a term coined by Reich, a psychoanalyst engaged in experiments in alternative healing during the middle of the twentieth century, to describe what he saw as a substance of innate life force within the cosmos, and particularly living beings, which moved through all things and could be passed through objects and from person to person for the purposes of healing.

Many books that deal with esoteric energy tend to list *ch'i*, *ki*, *prana* and *mana* together as if they are the same thing. While the pairs do rhyme nicely, it must be stated that *mana* does not belong in the list. *Mana* is a Polynesian word that basically means divine or spiritual power and authority or influence. It is the ability to direct energy, rather than the energy itself. (King 1992: 12)

King accounts for his earlier writings that equate mana with 'life force', for example in his discussions of manaplates and manaboxes, by stating that they were written at a time 'when I was still equating the word "mana" to life energy in order to simplify the introduction of Hawaiian concepts to the general public' (King 1999). Nevertheless, behind this conception of mana as human capacity, King retains a notion that there is an 'energy' that can be directed in this way, reflecting the widespread influence of these ideas in western esoteric traditions. This remains the hegemonic understanding of mana within New Age spirituality.

Mana in neopaganism

The concept of mana has entered into contemporary Paganism in North America primarily through the influence of Victor and Cora Anderson's Feri tradition. Feri was founded in the late 1940s in a similar period to the emergence of Wicca in Britain. The Andersons claimed their traditions represent an independent North American witchcraft practice pre-dating British Wicca, a claim which historian Chas Clifton suggests, inconclusively, is possible, although it is clear that the Andersons corresponded with Gerald Gardner, the founder of British Wicca, and read his books, incorporating many Wiccan elements into their practice (Clifton 2006: 130–32). Nevertheless, Feri has drawn some of its inspiration from sources apart from Wicca, including the incorporation of 'Hawaiian' elements.

Many claims are made about Victor Anderson's knowledge of Hawaiian beliefs. One Wiccan practitioner suggests that 'during his youth Victor also had many native Hawaiian teachers and through his training with them, he grew up to become an expert in ancient Hawaiian beliefs, a Kahuna' (Knowles 2009). Somewhat more plausibly, a Feri initiate and student of Cora Anderson writes on a website dedicated to Feri: 'Cora Anderson mentioned that Victor had a Hawaiian girlfriend

when he was in his early teens (to whom one of the poems in *Thorns* was dedicated), and was presumably exposed to Huna at that time' (V. Walker n.d.). While it is possible that such an early association could have sparked Anderson's interest, it is clear that Victor Anderson drew his 'Hawaiian' ideas from Long's work. This is particularly clear in Feri's three souls model of consciousness, which mirrors Long's system, and was sometimes taught using the names attributed by Long.

Since Feri is an orally transmitted initiatory tradition, the Andersons never systematised their ideas in writings, but rather transmitted different teachings at different times. Interviews I conducted with Feri practitioners in San Francisco in 2013 therefore display somewhat disparate understandings of Feri concepts, including Feri ideas on mana. Nevertheless, like the three souls model of consciousness, many of the characteristics seen in Long's writings on mana form consistent threads through the descriptions of these Feri initiates.

As in Huna, mana in Feri can be moved on the breath or 'ha'.⁸ One of the most fundamental exercises in Feri is the 'Ha Prayer', designed to draw in mana to align the three souls. Similarly, the 'Kala Rite' draws mana into a bowl of water held between the hands to purify the water, which can then be drunk to cleanse the soul. Cress, a new initiate, explained these commonplace exercises that she has been taught, through which mana is deployed:

So, you're breathing in the mana [in the Ha Prayer] ... It works better for me if I open my heart and go 'hhhh'. Because then it creates those blessings kind of just raining down on me and the Earth and everybody gets it. And I'm bringing it from everything, and I'm sending it back to everything, charged with who I am and what I'm doing.

... But there's also making kala, which is another way to align ... There's a ... blowing into the egg, and then changing it, blessing it, drinking it, which ... it seems to me that it's used for the same clearing and alignment, but it also seems to me to be used a little differently in my practice. Mostly because when I'm doing this, I have stuff to let go of. There's a cleansing that needs to happen before I can align. So it's much more focused on that than on bringing it in from my surroundings. (San Francisco Bay Area, 31 August 2013)

8 Hā: To breathe, exhale; to breathe upon ... breath, life (Pukui and Elbert 1986: 44).

While Cress's description of the Kala Rite is more personally focused, both of these practices reflect the fundamental idea, drawn from Huna, that 'mana', or 'life force', can be breathed in or otherwise drawn from its pervasive presence in the cosmos, and used for spiritual effect.

In these interviews, 'mana', 'life force' and 'energy' were generally used interchangeably to describe the fundamental force used to work magic. Starhawk, a Feri initiate who later became a founder and leading priestess in the Reclaiming community, wrote in the early 1980s:

This is where our language begins to break down ... Even if we were to speak of *ch'i* or *ki* or *mana*, or *the force* ... perhaps any name, any noun, would be a lie, because energy cannot be separated ... So I will now speak in these metaphors, as if energy were a thing rather than moving relationships, until we evolve the nounless language that would let us speak more truly. (1988: 29)

Mana, then, is interchangeable in Starhawk's writings for the complex of terms appropriated from a range of religious and spiritual traditions worldwide, yet which cannot quite capture the sense of 'moving relationships' she sees as the essence of spiritual activity. Nevertheless, she also wrote of these in substantive terms:

No modern English word quite conveys the meaning of *energy* in the sense I'm using it. The Chinese *ch'i*, the Hindu *prana*, and the Hawaiian *mana* are clearer terms for the idea of an underlying vital energy that infuses, creates, and sustains the physical body; it moves in our emotions, feelings and thoughts, and is the underlying fabric of all the material world. (1988: 51)

In this description, mana signifies an almost tangible substance that permeates the cosmos. Speaking to me in an interview, Starhawk stated:

There's the concept that kind of goes through western esotericism of energy and different etheric bodies and astral bodies. And I think that is similar to more the Huna idea of mana. But it's this idea of some kind of subtle energy that you're moving and shaping, and that moves through the universe. And that ritual is a process of kind of orchestrating a movement of that energy toward an intention that's embodied usually in an image or some sensual image to make things happen.

It's like a fluid in a way, in that it is a real thing, you know. You feel it, you can feel it around somebody, you can direct it, you can shape it. (San Francisco Bay Area, 27 August 2013)

This attribution of substantive qualities to mana is commonplace, echoing Long's understanding of mana as a substance which flows like water.

Feri practitioners describe a range of sensory experiences through which they detect the presence of mana. Aurora, who at the time of our interview had been studying Feri for approximately six years under multiple teachers, explained how she senses mana visually:

We usually seem to draw Blue Fire mana,⁹ so it's like we take a lens of mana, and we pull one type of energy ... we're just taking one slice of the pie.

... oh, my healing, when I do massage, we'd do a lot of like bringing in the golden light. I think that's very good for healing ... it's very protective and—how does it feel? It's like—I think of Apollo, it just feels very warm and—yeah that's a good one, it's a good one for healing.

And—or orange is—some of it relates to chakras—maybe it's because of my own experience of being trained in chakra energies ... but I do feel like the orange was more sexual, and the violet as being more ether and spirit. When we were doing work in ether and spirit realms, I did breathe in and connect a lot with violet and purple, and—yeah. Yellow's very golden and the East and bright.

Oh, and lime green, light green—the color of bright blades of grass is super-fey ... the fey, like the little people. (San Francisco Bay Area, 29 August 2013)

A more common way of sensing mana is through feeling it with one's inner feelings. As Thibaut describes his experience:

So the way that I feel it, breath is the tool to bring in ... And then I feel it in my belly, like I feel my belly filling up, and then it expands outside of my belly, like it takes more space, and so I have this external mana belly, if you wish, it's kind of this huge thing. And then I feel movement.

9 In Feri Tradition, mana used for rituals and spellcasting is widely imaged as blue, a conception that pre-dates the imaging of mana as blue or blue-green in gaming contexts (see Golub and Peterson, this volume). It is unclear that there is any direct relationship behind this same choice of colours between these two settings, but notable that an attribution of colour to mana, with its implications for the conception of mana as a fluid substance, is consistent between them.

... So it's very physical feeling of like energy moving. It's like, you know when you breathe in, and you push your breath into a limb, there's that feeling of something moving, it's kind of—that's the way to describe it.

And it can pool at extremities. Like I can feel it pool here [in his hands]. Or I can gather it in balls, and then I feel these balls at my extremities, and use it.

Yeah, like here [his gut], or in my hands. Like when I do the kala, I store the energy in my hands, going into the water, like it's very—some people say it's 'heat', some people say it's 'pressure'. (San Francisco Bay Area, 29 August 2013)

Mana then can be felt with inner feelings, or seen with an inner eye, or indeed (though more rarely) detected with a crackling in the ear or a smell in the air. In this way, mana is something bordering on tangible and physically substantive, discernable through an array of supersensory modalities.

Many of the explanations given of mana in Feri are expressed through similar metaphors of electricity which Long used in his work. Gwydion told the story of the first time he had seen what he called a 'physical manifestation' of working with mana, beyond his own internal perception of feeling it 'energetically'. As a young practitioner, at a restaurant in Berkeley, his mentor was explaining to him the process of charging water in the Kala Rite:

I think I said something like, 'Does that work?' You know, some naïve question. And she's like, 'Well yeah, watch this!' And she charged the glass of water and then just stepped back and she was like, 'watch'. And the waiter came over and picked up the glass to go and refill it and got a shock. And set it back down. (San Francisco Bay Area, 25 August 2013)

Likewise, Starhawk gave the following description of her teaching practice in Reclaiming, when I asked her about whether she saw mana as potentially dangerous:

Certainly in Reclaiming, what we try to do is encourage people to be grounded, and stay grounded. So it's when you're grounded, it's like you have a lightning rod. So if there's too much energy floating around, then it goes into the earth, and it sort of passes through you. (San Francisco Bay Area, 27 August 2013)

As with Long's work, these metaphors of electricity speak to ideas of the power or force seen to lie behind particular magical or ritual acts. As Aurora explained, this power is related to the amount of mana accessed:

Part of being able to charge your intentions or charge your spells, or be proactive is how much oomph you have behind it. If you're raising a cone of power,¹⁰ your juju,¹¹ it's very related to it. I mean part of it is the structure of how you're casting the spell, or putting your intention, saying or writing the correct thing that's actually what you mean to say is really important ... And the structure of that ritual or spell, so it's how you contain the vessel. But you still need the battery. The battery is very important.

And you can use other batteries ... like a candle or create a servitor¹² to do the work for you, like there's other ways to create batteries. But if you're the one charging the spell, you know, absolutely ... the more energy you have, the more power you have to do the things you want to do. (San Francisco Bay Area, 29 August 2013)

In many of these interviews, respondents switched freely between 'mana' and terms they see as related, particularly 'energy' and 'life force'. Mana has thus come to be associated in these New Age and contemporary Pagan systems of thought with a concept that holds a very central place in western esoteric traditions: a substantive vital essence that infuses the whole cosmos and serves as the source of power in prayer or ritual. Since Mesmer's work from the late eighteenth century, and emerging as a spiritualist concept in parallel with the science of electromagnetism, the metaphors, imagery and ideas of electricity and magnetism have become central means for explaining and apprehending this vital essence. The language of electric forces, voltages, grounding and batteries has thus become familiar for those seeking to explain the workings of their magic. As the concept of mana has been drawn into this theoretical schema, it too has come to be understood through similar metaphors of substance, flow and electromagnetic power.

10 A cone of power is an energetic field seen as being raised at the heart of rituals and spells and directed towards a particular, focused purpose.

11 Juju is used informally among Pagans to describe their magical drive or vitality.

12 A servitor is an energy form created to carry out a particular task.

As in Huna, mana in Feri can be directed toward the self, used for healing, ‘alignment’ or other spellwork. Thibaut described how he directs the mana he feels within himself, in a version of the soul alignment exercise:

So I put it in my Fetch [the animal self], and then I move it so I feel this conduit being created. And then when I push it to align the Goddess-self, it kind of there’s this rush of energy going through, that goes up and then feeds the God-self, the Holy demon, the Goddess-self, and that falls down, and I feel it falling down. (San Francisco Bay Area, 29 August 2013)

But because it is understood as permeating every corner of the cosmos, for Feri practitioners, mana can also be used to connect with one’s surroundings and infuse it with blessings. Using a similar notion of creating a conduit through which mana can move, Cress described this process of feeding mana back into the surroundings at a Feri camp she attended:

We were doing a cone [of power], and we were feeding the spirits, and feeding the land with it, and we were also collecting it up and sending it back up again, and making another cone. And it seems that the energy and the blessings that come from that—that connection between spirit and land. (San Francisco Bay Area, 31 August 2013)

Such processes express a sense of interconnection with the cosmos, and, more immediately, with the land of the immediate environment and its attendant spirits.

Thus mana in Feri is seen as a relational phenomenon. Yet, in sharp contrast to the mana of Hawai’i and many other regions of Oceania, the relationships mana encapsulates in Feri (or in Huna) are rarely located at a social level. A telling contrast can be found in the writings of Wende Elizabeth Marshall in *Potent Mana*, where she explores the centrality of Hawaiian ideas of healing for a Kanaka Maoli population suffering from poverty, illness and the effects of colonisation and dispossession:

The healing practices and epistemologies of late-twentieth-century Native Hawaiians invigorated and applied methods and ways of understanding illness from the ancestral past ... By expanding the meaning of health to include the impact of politics, economics, and culture on the bodies of the colonized, health and political power were decisively linked. (2011: 7)

Marshall then situates the reclaiming of mana taking place through this healing work as part of the broader sovereignty movement aimed at decolonisation: 'Reclaiming mana as ontology is crucial for decolonization and is an exigency for the survival of indigenous Hawaiians' (2011: 6). Very different from that of New Age and Pagan conceptions, the mana of Kanaka Maoli healing evokes a collective power mobilised for the purposes of transforming a whole community. While many New Age and Pagan practitioners are concerned about the alienating effects of oppressive social structures, rarely would one find the mana of healing spoken about in such expressly social terms.

Concluding remarks

Lisa Kahaleole Hall, in a scathing critique of appropriation of Kanaka Maoli tradition by non-Hawaiians, writes:

'Hawaiians at heart' are joined by 'Hawaiians of the spirit' in the New Age spiritual industry's marketing of 'huna' practices ... They are an eclectic bunch, however; Huna.com notes, 'We also offer Training in Neuro-Linguistic Programming, Hypnosis, Time Line Therapy®, The Secret of Creating Your Future®, & Ancient Hawaiian Huna.' The problem with this, of course, is that it bears absolutely no resemblance to any Hawaiian worldview or spiritual practice. Some of these Huna practitioners, including the extremely popular Serge 'Kahili' King, claim a lineage that comes from 'Starmen from the Pleiades', which would be fine if they would just leave Hawaiians out of it ... The disrespect, exploitation, and cultural distortion and appropriation of Hawaiian culture and identity would be hard enough to deal with in the best of times—but these are not the best of times for Hawaiians. (Hall 2005: 411–12)

The idea of Huna as a Hawaiian tradition has a significant impact on Kanaka Maoli and their understandings of Hawaiian tradition, as the founders of the website and Facebook page 'Huna is not Hawaiian' suggest. In an interview explaining why they started this project, Kelea Levy described attending a class at college in which she was shown a video they were told represented Hawaiian traditional healing practices:

Right away, when I saw in that video in class what the lady was doing, something didn't seem right. I got really turned off when I had to turn in a paper on the video and I said that Huna was not Hawaiian

and from this made the analysis that maybe nothing in the video was real and could be used as a basis for determining a universal way of diagnosing and treating disease in the world—and I was graded down for this. (Levy, Ka'upenamana, Chai and Auvil 2012)

Makana Risser Chai, a contributor to the website, states as one of the main reasons for her involvement: 'I wish that people, especially Hawaiians, would realize the Huna [sic] is insidiously destroying Hawaiian culture. There are so many Hawaiians today who are using Huna words and/or concepts, thinking they are Hawaiian' (Levy, Ka'upenamana, Chai and Auvil 2012).

Hall uses the term 'Plastic Shamans' to describe practitioners of Huna, adopting Lisa Aldred's (2000) term critiquing widespread appropriation of American Indian culture by New Age movements. It is certainly true that appropriation of indigenous spiritual, religious and traditional concepts is rife, and often uncritical, in New Age and contemporary Pagan contexts. There are exceptions to the rule. During my interviews, Cress stated that most of her teachers used the term 'life-force' rather than 'mana'. In some cases at least, this avoidance may be a deliberate recognition of problems of appropriation, a recognition I have heard expressed by a small minority of practitioners in other contexts. With regard to the ideas of Huna in Feri tradition, Cress went on to reflect:

I've no idea how that relates to what the Pacific Islanders do. I know that—you know, I know that—what's his name? – Anderson, Victor, studied the somebody in Hawaii ... other people can clearly delineate, and I don't know whether he stole a bunch of stuff, whether he read a bunch of stuff and put it in his practice, I don't know. (San Francisco Bay Area, 29 August 2013)

The concept of mana in Feri is now at many steps removed from Long's appropriation of Hawaiian-language terms, with most practitioners unaware of this genealogy. Thus the concept of mana, and related ideas, has come to take on a new form within these western esoteric traditions, not completely disconnected from, but certainly generally apart from, how their meanings take shape and transform in Oceania. Many New Age and contemporary Pagan practitioners have a very deep blind spot around issues of appropriation, and continue to use terms such as mana unaware of the potential impact this misappropriation has on those from whom the ideas were originally adopted. It is also

the case that some non-Native practitioners are making substantial money from the perpetuation of these ideas as 'native wisdom'. Nevertheless, I would suggest that the term 'plastic shaman'—implying inauthenticity, pretence and commercialisation—does not capture well the full spectrum of those engaging with the ideas and practices explored here. Many New Age and Pagan practitioners are also often very serious in their spiritual practices, dedicating a great deal of thought, time and experience to their traditions. It may well be hoped that a much greater level of critical awareness and caution be seen in the adoption of language, concepts and practices within these movements, but in my research, I would suggest that those who adopt concepts of mana are deeply committed and genuine in their pursuit of spiritual practices. They are not 'fakes'.

The concept of 'mana', for better or worse, has thus been transformed through its adoption into New Age and contemporary Pagan spiritual traditions. One of the key ideas in this transformation is that of mana as a force of the cosmos, likened to electrical and magnetic forces and flows. Such an idea, as Roger Keesing pointed out in his 1984 paper 'Rethinking "Mana"', has also been central to interpretations of mana as they have appeared in ethnographic literature since the foundational writings of the Reverend Robert Henry Codrington. Keesing suggests that Codrington was influenced in his conception of mana by western metaphors, in particular by the science of the nineteenth century (compare Kolshus, this volume). He states that 'mana as invisible medium of power was an invention of Europeans, drawing on their own folk metaphors of power and the theories of nineteenth-century physics' (Keesing 1984: 148), elaborating that:

Because of the way we metaphorically substantivize 'power', the term was adopted to label quantifiable electrical energy as a medium whose flow could be channelled through cables and directed to human ends. This physicalist conception of electrical energy as power ... has affected characterizations of mana. (Keesing 1984: 150)

Such physicalist metaphors have also had a powerful bearing on western esotericism, informing ideas about cosmic 'energy' and 'life force' that took shape through the spiritual traditions of the nineteenth century. This in turn seems to have affected Long's interpretation of 'mana', echoed in the metaphors of mana as 'voltage' and 'power' and the idea that mana 'flows' and 'charges' objects, can be stored and channelled. As Long wrote:

In the bulky literature which has grown up around psychic phenomena and spiritualism during the century just past, scattered postulations are to be found covering the possible part magnetism may have in the action of motricity on objects. This is a most exciting and promising line of thought and, because of the unexplored territory which it still surrounds, it is recommended to the reader as a fine place to begin working with a view to helping to forward the general investigation of magic. (Long 1954: 31)

In New Age conceptions, this idea of mana as a force or flow goes hand in hand with its perceived role in spiritual healing and individual transformation. What is notably absent in this conception is much emphasis on mana as a collective attribute, or on the role of others in attributing mana to those seen as most effective or powerful. In the New Age and Pagan contexts, mana is a spiritual substance that exists independently of human activity, and can thereby be accessed by individuals for their own healing, influence or spiritual work. It has substantive qualities that can be sensed through touch, breath, colour, and in many other ways, and can be used to enhance personal power. But its relationship to the social world is at one remove; it is not so much part of a social system, as a key component of a cosmic system to which all people potentially have access as individuals, regardless of their social context.

References

- Aldred, Lisa. 2000. Plastic shamans and astroturf sun dances: New Age commercialization of Native American spirituality. *The American Indian Quarterly* 24(3): 329–52.
- Blavatsky, Helena. 2006 [1889]. *The Key to Theosophy: Being a Clear Exposition in the Form of Question and Answer of the Ethics, Science, and Philosophy*. Theosophy Trust Books. Online: www.theosophytrust.org/Online_Books/The_Key_to_Theosophy_V1.5.pdf (accessed 27 July 2014).
- Chai, Makana Risser. 2011. Huna, Max Freedom Long and the idealization of William Brigham. *Hawaiian Journal of History* 45: 101–21.

- Clifton, Chas. 2006. *Her Hidden Children: The Rise of Wicca and Paganism in America*. Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press.
- Crews, Frederick C. 1996. The consolation of theosophy II. *The New York Review of Books* 43 (15). Online: www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/1996/oct/03/the-consolation-of-theosophy-ii/ (accessed 27 January 2014).
- Hall, Lisa Kahaleole. 2005. 'Hawaiian at heart' and other fictions. *The Contemporary Pacific* 17(2): 404–13.
- Kalani. 2010. Kalani Retreat Center Facebook Page. Online: www.facebook.com/Kalani.Oceanside (accessed 13 September 2013).
- . 2011. Mastering stress for optimal health. *Kalani Retreat Center*. Online: www.kalani.com/workshops/2011/mastering-stress-optimal-health (accessed 27 January 2014).
- Keesing, Roger M. 1984. Rethinking 'mana'. *Journal of Anthropological Research* 40(1): 137–56.
- King, Serge. n.d. Serge King's biodata. *Serge's Cybership*. Online: www.sergeking.com/skbio.html (accessed 26 January 2014).
- . 1992. *Earth Energies: a Quest for the Hidden Power of the Planet*. Wheaton, IL: Quest Books.
- . 1999. The amazing manabloc. *Serge's Cybership*. Online: www.sergeking.com/Pscience/manabloc.html (accessed 26 January 2014).
- . 2009. *Urban Shaman*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Knowles, George. 2009. Victor Henry Anderson. *Controversial.com*. Online: www.controversial.com/Victor%20Henry%20Anderson.htm (accessed 27 January 2014).
- Lee, Pali Jae. 2007 (2nd ed., large print). *Ho'opono: The Hawaiian Way to Put Things Back Into Balance*. Mountain View, HI: I.M. Publishing, Ltd.

- Levy, Kelea, Maija Athena Ka'upenamana, Makana Risser Chai and Jolene Uyehara Auvil. 2012. The women of 'Huna Is Not Hawaiian': Part 2. Interview by Adam Kinau Manalo-Camp. *The Examiner*. Online: www.examiner.com/article/the-women-of-huna-is-not-hawaiian-part-2 (accessed 22 October 2015).
- Long, Max Freedom. 1954. *The Secret Science Behind Miracles*. Santa Monica, CA: DeVorss.
- . 1981 (6th ed.). *Mana or Vital Force: Selections from Huna Research Bulletins*. Cape Girardeau, MO: Huna Research Association.
- Marshall, Wende Elizabeth. 2011. *Potent Mana: Lessons in Healing and Power*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Pukui, Mary Kawena and Samuel H. Elbert. 1986 (revised and enlarged edition). *Ulukau: Hawaiian Dictionary*. Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press. Online: www.ulukau.org/elib/cgi-bin/library?e=d-0ped-000Sec--11en-50-20-frameset-search-h%e4-1-010escapewin&a=d&p2=book (accessed 28 January 2014).
- Rodman, Julius Scammon. 1979 (1st ed., 1st printing edition). *The Kahuna Sorcerers of Hawaii, Past and Present*. Hicksville, NY: Exposition Press.
- Starhawk. 1988. *Dreaming the Dark: Magic Sex and Politics*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Walker, K. LeslyAnn. 2005. Call for Help! *New Age Frauds and Plastic Shamans Forum*. Online: www.newagefraud.org/smf/index.php?topic=316.msg1334;topicseen#msg1334 (accessed 26 January 2014).
- Walker, Valerie. n.d. Feri FAQs. *Feri Tradition: Articles, Exercises, Lore*. Online: www.wiggage.com/witch/feriFAQ.8.html (accessed 27 January 2014).

This text is taken from *New Mana: Transformations of a Classic Concept in Pacific Languages and Cultures*, edited by Matt Tomlinson and Ty P. Kāwika Tengan, published 2016 by ANU Press, The Australian National University, Canberra, Australia.