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*Travels in Space and Time*

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# Afterword: Shape-Shifting Mana: Travels in Space and Time

Niko Besnier and Margaret Jolly

There are perhaps few concepts with the geographical ubiquity, historical resilience and shape-shifting capacity of mana. Emanating from Oceania, but resonating far beyond, the word '*mana*' in many local articulations references contextually specific and contested meanings, and assumes very different inflections as it travels across the space and time of the Pacific and our shared planet. The word and the diverse concepts to which it refers exemplify not only the challenges of communication across languages and cultures, but also the politics of such communication, as well as the ethical parameters of our comparisons. This entails confronting not only the conventional genealogies of *mana* in the discipline of anthropology, with its celebrated (yet often forgotten) ancestors, but also the deeper genealogies of the word and concept for Pacific peoples in precolonial practices manifest in localised bodies and voices and in Oceanic circuits of navigation, migration and exchange. *Mana* has moved between local vernaculars and global *lingue franche* in precolonial and colonial times and in our shared present, a space and time which is global in new and distinctive ways. Just as *mana* captured the imagination of anthropologists, literary theorists and scholars of comparative religion in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, it has also fuelled in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries the creative rituals of New Age religions and the fantasies of popular culture: science fictions and video and computer games, in which real and virtual worlds collude and collide.

## Grounding the anthropological genealogies of a ‘floating signifier’

Several chapters in this volume and, most comprehensively, the introduction plot the genealogy of *mana* in anthropology. We will not rehearse the details of these discussions here but rather highlight the contests and ruptures that punctuate the lengthy and tortuous history of western scholarly discussion. Early analyses of the concept can be found in the dictionaries compiled by nineteenth-century missionaries that attempted to explain Polynesian languages to English-speaking readerships, such as Lorrin Andrews’ of Hawaiian (1836), John Davies’ of Tahitian (1991 [1851]) and George Pratt’s of Samoan (1862). But it was the celebrated apical ancestor, the Reverend Robert Henry Codrington, first in correspondence with Max Müller, which the latter interpreted in his 1878 lecture (1910 [1878]), and then in Codrington’s own *The Melanesians* (1957 [1891]), where he proposed a definition that would become hegemonic: ‘what works to effect everything which is beyond the ordinary power of men, outside the common processes of nature’ (118–19).

Within both anthropology and comparative religion, theorists such as Émile Durkheim (1965 [1915]), Marcel Mauss (1972 [1950]) and R.R. Marett (1929) first adduced the concept in their universalist and evolutionary theories of religion. It was later redeployed in the more relativist and functionalist approaches of Ian Hogbin (1936) and Raymond Firth (1940). In these early debates, tensions were already evident, not just between universalist and relativist positions, but also between those who, like Müller, evoked a mystical concept, ‘a name for a force that transcends all names and exceeds all forces’ (Tomlinson and Tengan, this volume), and those who stressed instead the materiality of *mana*’s efficacy in this world, despite its divine associations. There was also a tension between those who emphasised how this extraordinary power could infuse both human and non-human agency (gods, spirits, or even stones) and others who understood it as an ineffable power beyond nature. Most scholars of that era took for granted the universality of distinctions between nature and culture, natural and supernatural, which, although foundational in western philosophies of the period, were largely foreign to Oceanic peoples.

Later, Claude Lévi-Strauss espoused the ubiquity of the nature–culture distinction in his structuralist model, and saw *mana* as universal, permanent and embracing several antinomies: ‘force and action; quality and state; substantive, adjective and verb all at once; abstract and concrete; omnipresent and localised’ (1987 [1950]: 64). Anxious to domesticate volatile notions to a structuralist order, Lévi-Strauss affirmed that *mana* was the canonical ‘floating signifier’:<sup>1</sup> a sign that can refer to seemingly incommensurable antinomies, and one that thus falls outside of structures of oppositions, capable of absorbing meanings at will and, like algebraic symbols, liable to ‘take on any symbolic content whatever’ (Lévi-Strauss 1987 [1950]: 64).

As Matt Tomlinson and Ty P. Kāwika Tengan (this volume) observe, subsequent anthropologists consummately integrated Oceanic ethnographic and linguistic data with larger theoretical concerns but kept returning to older questions. Roger M. Keesing (1984) argued that *mana* had been misapprehended through the conventional metaphors of foreign languages and western philosophies. Valerio Valeri (1985) argued that, in ancient Hawai‘i, the *mana* of the gods did not pre-exist but was rather created by human worship. Bradd Shore (1982, 1989) stressed that the generative potency of the gods was sexualised in eastern Polynesia and desexualised in western Polynesia. Basing his argument on historical linguistic comparisons, Robert Blust (2007) suggested that *mana* was first associated with powerful natural forces like thunder and wind but later denoted a detached and invisible supernatural agency. Alan Rumsey (this volume) addresses linguist Juliette Blevins’ (2008) analysis of the linguistic history of *mana* and discerns in the loan word *pawa*, used in Tok Pisin and the Papuan language Ku Waru spoken in the Papua New Guinea Highlands, a congruent notion of divine power or efficacy close to *mana*’s classic meanings in anthropology.

We can reflect critically on how *mana* has been conceived in anthropological and linguistic debates by drawing on more recent thinking about language. First, despite the structuralist attention to the distinction between signifier and signified in early debates, much early discussion of the ‘meaning’ of *mana* was marred by confusion over whether it was about mana (as a concept), *mana*

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1 Alan Rumsey (this volume) reminds us that this term as Lévi-Strauss first used it was already mana-like in its fertility.

(as a word in some meta-language, generally conflated with English or French), or '*mana*' (as a word in a specific language).<sup>2</sup> As a result, early researchers attempted to circumscribe *mana* through doubtful comparisons with other words that resembled it, thus juxtaposing the referents of these various words and drawing inferences about their meanings (e.g. Collocott 1921). These exercises in 'word prospecting' (Tomlinson and Bigitibau, this volume) extracted terms from their discursive context and turned the concepts which scholars believed them to express into discrete and stable entities, separate from the social, cultural and political contexts in which they emerged and were transformed. The same kind of confusion between language and concepts was reproduced by Keesing (1984: 138), who recast *mana*, the concept, as 'canonically a stative verb not a noun', as if cultural categories were units of language.<sup>3</sup> Language pervades contexts in which *mana* operates, but in a very different way from what these earlier thinkers postulated. These considerations highlight the fact that, to understand *mana* and its workings in its various manifestations across time and space, we must shift our focus away from problems of translation and from attempts to 'match' meanings across languages, and instead engage with the social and cultural practices that surround concepts.

Second, the shifting nature of *mana* and related concepts may be better served by moving it from a structuralist frame into a framework of Peircean semiotics (see also Ohnuki-Tierney 1994). In that framework,

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2 Although we make these important distinctions here through the use of different fonts and quote marks, these are not made consistently throughout this text and the chapters in this volume, where *mana* is occasionally italicised regardless of whether it is used to refer to a word or a concept, to a specific language or a meta-language.

3 To be fair to Keesing, his conclusions were less categorical. To quote the rest of the passage in which this occurs:

things and human enterprises and efforts are *mana*. *Mana* is used as a transitive verb as well: ancestors and gods *mana*-ize people and their efforts. Where *mana* is used as a noun, it is (usually) not as a substantive but as an abstract verbal noun denoting the state or quality of *mana*-ness (of a thing or act) or being-*mana* (of a person). Things that are *mana* are efficacious, potent, successful, true, fulfilled, realized: they 'work'. *Mana*-ness is a state of efficacy, success, truth, potency, blessing, luck, realization, an abstract state or quality, not an invisible spiritual substance or medium. (1984: 138)

Moreover, Keesing suggested that the process of nominalisation and substantivisation was minimal in the western Pacific but more developed in the east and especially in eastern Polynesia, where 'a metaphysic of *mana*' was developed by a hereditary aristocratic class and an associated class of theologians who 'as part of the sacred chief's entourage, celebrating and rationalizing the chief's sanctity, seem to have elaborated the cosmological implications of *mana* as metaphoric "power"' (1984: 152).

one semiotic category, namely indexicality, has precisely the qualities that Lévi-Strauss was struggling to capture with the label ‘floating signifier’, namely the ability to attach itself to different kinds of significations according to context and the capacity to *constitute* that context rather than merely *reflecting* it. This perspective allows us to understand not only the transformations that *mana* has undergone across time and space, but also the fact that change is inherent in the concept itself.

Third, following from this, we can help capture the dynamic nature of *mana* through its reconceptualisation as a performative, in other words as a concept whose invocation has the power of changing the way in which the world is constituted. Judith Butler’s (1990) reframing of Austinian performativity (Austin 1962) locates the performative power of utterances in their citationality—the accumulation of prior citation of the same utterance that gives effectiveness to each new manifestation, reinforcing its links to the emotions, cosmologies, sensory experiences, metaphors, deportments and material objects that constitute and surround it—but also raises the possibility of disruption, in the same way that ‘keywords’ are subject to contestation.

Viewed through this lens, we no longer need to agonise about value-laden questions of authenticity and usurpation in the various transformations that we are witnessing, and we can begin to grapple with the fact that words and concepts travel, sometimes in very different contexts from their origin (Rumsey, Golub, Mawyer, Morgain, this volume). Thus, in reflecting with the editors and contributors to this volume on ‘mana anew’, we see the exercise not so much as a search for definitive definitions or the core truth of concepts but rather, as Rumsey (this volume) persuasively suggests, approaching *mana* as a ‘keyword’ in Raymond Williams’ (1976) sense, namely a word denoting large labile concepts, and subject to intense contestation and immense transformations across diverse contexts of time and space.

## ***Mana’s oceanic travels***

This volume is not primarily concerned with plotting the genealogies of *mana* as word and concept in scholarly debates, but rather, and more crucially, in tracking its changing meanings and contexts in Oceania and beyond. As Tomlinson and Tengan (this volume) observe,

*mana* is articulated across diverse contexts in contemporary Oceania, most prominently in discourses of cultural loss, cultural resistance and cultural renaissance, as well as in Christian spaces. Most chapter authors explore how *mana*, travelling through space and time, has shape-shifted. There were likely important early transformations in passages across the Pacific in the context of ancient navigations, the first settlements of Austronesian-speaking and Lapita-making peoples and later processes in the regional circulation of peoples, materials and ideas. These transformations can be partially reconstructed through the combined techniques of historical linguistics, archaeology and indigenous oral histories. We can also witness transformations using archival research (especially texts in Pacific Islands languages) and through embodied ethnographies. *Mana* has survived tremendous historical upheavals, including colonialism, labour migrations, diasporic dispersals, the rise and fall of polities, the emergence of state structures, as well as the introduction of new cosmologies, moralities and laws. Its meanings have variously fallen into disuse, been co-opted by new religious configurations or amalgamated with other concepts, and, when one least expected it, re-emerged, Phoenix-like, with new cultural and political vigour. It is this power of transformation that the contributors to this volume attend to in different ways, what Alexander Mawyer (this volume) calls the 'ontologically lush and semantically verdant' qualities of *mana*.

The chapters by Noenoe K. Silva, Mawyer and Andy Mills all use archival sources to witness these transformations. Silva analyses nineteenth-century Hawaiian-language texts produced in the context of Christian conversion and constitutional crises. Her earlier work on Hawaiian-language newspapers, first produced by the foreign Congregational mission from 1834 but under Kanaka Ma'oli control from 1861, revealed the broad base of indigenous resistance to colonial influence and claims of sovereignty (Silva 2004). In newspapers of the period, *mana* is almost exclusively associated with the Christian God, but Silva also detects a crucial contrast between a *haole* missionary text, in which God's *mana* is seen as pre-existent and omnipotent, and that of an indigenous student, in which the *mana* of God was instead dependent on humans and other animated creatures and things. The discursive contexts in which *mana* appeared in early documents suggest a gradual transformation. In the first Hawaiian constitution,

the term *'olelo* (to say, tell), rather than *mana*, is used to denote *ali'i* (chiefly) power. By 1850, however, *mana* was being used for the power of government.

Thus Silva discerns that the earlier, deeply relational constitution of *mana* gradually gave way to a more codified sense, which suggested a more inherent and genealogical divine power of the *ali'i nui* (high chiefs, royals) like the Kāmehamehas. The power of introduced laws seems to have aided a shift in the relational power skywards away from the earth, perhaps rendering it more transcendent than immanent. Later, in the context of the dispossession of Hawaiian land, the texts of Samuel Kamakau (1869) critiqued western governance, suggesting that the Kāmehamehas were powerful not because of Jehovah's *mana* or introduced law but because they had the power to grant life and refrain from killing in war, thereby pursuing the ethical value of *pono* (harmony). Silva witnesses the celebration of *pono* and *mana* in the contemporary Hawaiian renaissance not as an individuated life energy (as adherents of some New Age religions posit), but as a shared force of the Indigenous collectivity.

Combining archival sources with contemporary ethnography, Mawyer plots the divergent histories of *mana* in French Polynesia, contrasting the Society Islands with Mangareva in the Gambier Islands to warn against the 'intellectual seductions of reductionism' in searching for a 'singular disciplinary meaning'. Again, the Oceanic travels of *mana* defy such a search. Whereas formerly *mana* was rarely attested in historical records or everyday speech in the Society Islands, today it is often used across diverse contexts. In the few extant nineteenth-century Mangarevan texts, *mana* is similarly 'remarkably absent', but its use today is still rare and restricted. In both places, *mana* has been reconfigured under the influence of Catholic and Protestant missionaries, the movement of commodities and the incursions of French written laws and principles of power and land tenure. Mawyer discerns not so much a process of disenchantment, of the divine associations of *mana* being hollowed out, but the differential flow (and blockages) of both the spectral and the secular powers of *mana*. In Tahiti, *mana* proliferated first in the discourses of Evangelical Protestantism and later in the politics of cultural revival, where it is frequently adduced in literature written in both Tahitian and French. In Mangareva, in contrast, *mana* is now so rarely used that

it is a *tapu* word. It usually refers to the marvelous works of ancient culture heroes; when it refers to modern concepts, these are only extraordinarily powerful world-changing acts.

With E.E.V. Collocott (1921), Mills suggests that the Tongan words *mana* and *manava* (viscera) were embodied in the lives of pre-Christian Tongans. Although the two terms have distinct etymological roots, Mills speculates that they may have been linked in broader cultural practices, not just as words but in the dispositions of bodies and spaces. He imagines an indigenous physiology linking body parts and emanations with hegemonies of hierarchy based on rank, seniority and gender. The organs exchange with the world—drawing in oxygen, water, food and semen, excreting carbon dioxide, urine, faeces, blood, semen and babies. The pulses of corporeal life would have been signs of vitality in the respiratory, digestive and reproductive cycles. Mills links them to states of *tapu*, forbidden or closed, which he classifies as episodic, relational or regulatory. Episodic *tapu* is that which ensues from contact with a superior's *mana*. Relational *tapu* was intrinsic and enduring in chiefly–commoner relations. Kinship hierarchies reinscribed this distinction since parents, sisters and elder siblings were of higher rank than, respectively, children, brothers and younger siblings. Relational *tapu* changed as people's vitality, agency, sexual potency, courage and authority increased and declined. Gender-specific trajectories were mapped out in puberty rituals for boys and girls, in birth rituals for women and tattooing for men. Regulatory *tapu* was evinced in kava ceremonies and especially in the royal kava ceremony, which corporealised a stable kingship. Mills suggests that the Christianisation of Tonga, which began in the 1820s, eroded the *tapu* system, entailing a profound transformation in the ontological foundations and phenomenological orientations of Tongan society.

## ***Mana* in diverse Christian manifestations**

The chapters by Thorgeir Kolshus, Jessica Hardin, Aram Oroï, and Matt Tomlinson and Sekove Bigitibau focus an ethnographic attention on recent reconfigurations of *mana* in the context of Christianity. They evince the diversity of denominational experiences and cultural contexts as *mana* shifts its shape in Vanuatu, the Solomon Islands, Samoa and Fiji.

Working on Mota in North Vanuatu, where Codrington spent two years of his life and on which he based his analysis of *mana*, Kolshus stresses the historical context of Bible translation in the Anglican Melanesian Mission and the circulation of Mota converts and British missionaries who knew Māori to the Melanesian Mission School on Norfolk Island, catalysing new contacts between Pacific Islanders. He observes how *mana* has shape-shifted in the context of a pervasive and indigenised Anglican Christianity. It is most clearly manifest in the Mota liturgy; the power of God and the Holy Spirit is its core, which is concentrated in the clergy and celibate priests and transmitted through the transubstantiation of communion to the congregation. But, as Codrington suggested, *mana* is amoral, in the sense that it can be used for positive or destructive ends (see also Taylor 2015, 2016). Although *mana* can be witnessed in the efficacy of penicillin, the abundance of money or the closely guarded secrets of the *tamate* secret society, its predominant use is in contexts reconfigured by Anglican theology. The Anglican priest Walter Lini, the inaugural prime minister of independent Vanuatu, was credited with enormous and dangerous *mana*. In contrast, Mota Islanders who converted to Assemblies of God (AOG) critique the dominance of the Anglican hierarchy and celebrate instead the channelling of *mana* through ordinary persons, as witnessed in individual possession by the Holy Spirit.

Oroi's study of his home island Makira in the Solomons is also focused on Anglican Christianity's pervasive influence. It can be pragmatically channelled when power is needed; it is a 'spiritual switch', like the button on a torch that releases the battery's energies (see also Morgain, this volume, on electrical metaphors). The clergy and catechists can manifest such power, but so can spirits and sorcerers with whom they compete. Oroi compares the approaches of Codrington, Keesing and Firth with insider indigenous theologians like Esau Tuza (1979) and himself, but contrasts the approach of secular sceptics like Keesing with resident missionaries like Codrington and Fox. Western concepts of *mana* as power can neglect its spiritual essence, independent of action but only realised in action.

Jessica Hardin shifts our focus to Samoa and to the relation between *mana* and *pule* (authority) in embodied Christian practice. AOG adherents in Samoa see their church as being filled with the Holy Spirit's *mana*, which engenders love and togetherness, but Christians must pray and fast to bring this *mana* into their lives and into the

church. In everyday practice, this entails a very particular form of 'self-making' but, contrary to the view that Pentecostal Christianity is zealously individualist, they 'de-centre individual agency while revealing the divine as the source of efficacious action'. Hardin sees the Samoan social field as biased against untitled authority and individual agency but Pentecostal churches celebrate the individual's personal relation to God in contrast to mainstream churches, where the clergy are the conduit for the Holy Spirit. Performative utterances and embodiments of faith are like a 'spiritual telephone' to God, healing bodies, filling wallets and replenishing food supplies. AOG adherents intercede on behalf of the sick and the suffering, claiming the *pule* (authority) to do so yet simultaneously authoring themselves as abject, without the *mana* of God. Hardin thus adjudges that the tensions between an individualist and relational sense of self are mediated and redressed through such Pentecostal practices.

Matt Tomlinson and Sekove Bigitibau explore the relation in Fiji between *mana* and another concept, that of *sau* (chiefly power). Performative speech acts in contemporary Fiji often make reference to *mana* to effect some desired outcome or make something come true, such as the abundance of food or the continuity of chiefs' power. Yet some Fijians claim that *mana* is a foreign word while vaunting *sau* as indigenous; others distinguish *sau* from *mana*; and still others use them interchangeably. What is certain is that, particularly under the influence of Methodist Bible translations, *mana* has come to be thought of over time as 'spiritual power' and especially, though not exclusively, that of chiefs (Tomlinson 2006).

The strong historical links between the Methodist church and the chiefly hierarchy is mitigated by tensions between the chiefs and church leaders. Especially since Commodore Frank Bainimarama's military coup in 2006, the close relation between mainstream Methodism and the government has broken down, and this has prompted soul-searching among Fijians about the relation between human and divine power. Tomlinson and Bigitibau trace these debates through the theologies of several Fijian theologians: Ilaitia Sevati Tuwere, whose radically inclusive approach sees a new *mana* in Christ amidst the political turmoil of nationalist pro-chiefly forces; Lesila Raitiqa, who sees *mana* grounded in the land as uniformly good and beautiful in contrast to the moral ambiguity of *sau*; Apete Toko, for whom *mana* is grounded in land and people even if ministers are best able to access

it; and Lisa Meo, who sees *mana* as the power to bless and *sau* as the power to curse, and the church as having the legitimate right to claim power for the powerless. These theologians valorise tradition and chiefly hierarchy while simultaneously trying to supersede it.

## Engendering contemporary *mana* in art and sport

The chapters of Ty P. Kāwika Tengan and Katerina Martina Teaiwa analyse *mana*'s reclamation in contemporary museums and sports fields, highlighting the gendered nature of this reclamation. In Hawai'i, the Bishop Museum in 2010 brought together again for the first time since the nineteenth century three images of the god Kū from the same temple, one from the British Museum, one from the Peabody Museum in Salem, Massachusetts, and one that had been kept in the Bishop Museum. Tengan situates this recuperative event in the context of the perceived emasculation and feminisation of the Hawaiian nation by the combined forces of colonialism, tourism and militarism. It is not only the land and Hawaiian women that are feminised and sexualised, but also the sovereignty movement, which is dominated by women, who thus appear more endowed with the *mana* of leadership than men. Kū is often known reductively as the 'god of war' but his martial essence is but one manifestation of a much broader notion of male generative potency and efficacious creation. Many images of Kū were literally emasculated by Christian missionaries and indigenous converts, as their genitals were cut off and their whole bodies burnt or buried. Contemporary Kanaka Māoli artist Carl Pao has reflected on that emasculation and restored male potency through sculptures with bountiful large penes and penetrative presence (see Jolly 2008a). Working alongside the project director Noelle Kahanu, Tengan witnessed the power that these images exerted on Kanaka Māoli, especially men. But this remasculination is a rather complex, even contradictory, process, as many men revalue the martial manifestations of anti-colonial masculinity in relation to their service in the United States military (Tengan 2008). The exhibit allowed an assertion of Indigenous continuity despite enormous transformations and afforded a context to reflect on how *mana* could reshape the often strained relations between indigenous people, anthropologists and museums.

Katerina Martina Teaiwa's chapter focuses on diasporic Samoans and Tongans in the world of football, especially the National Rugby League in Australia. Mainstream representations of diasporic Pacific Islanders in Australia are dominated by negative images of young men as large, tough and associated with criminal gangs (see Bolitho 2014). But the visibility of Polynesian men in popular culture and especially sport affords a different image. Elite diasporic Polynesian male athletes are not only fetishised and commoditised brown bodies but are also subjects who embody *mana*. Using discourses of new *mana*, they stress that their strength, efficacy and economic success can benefit not only themselves as individuals but also their families, churches, villages and countries of origin (see also Besnier 2012, 2014). They have introduced Christian prayers as part of training and pre-game rituals, and valorise qualities such as humility and respect (compare Rial 2012 on charismatic Brazilian football players). Teaiwa reads the 2010 Body Pacifica initiative at the Casula Powerhouse in Sydney (exhibitions, performances, workshops, digital displays and a hugely popular calendar) as celebrating not just the physiques of the players but also their *mana*. Their giant photos in the first floor of the gallery became 'god-like images' benevolently watching over the crowds thronging below. The particular settler colonial space of Australia with its 'seriously unresolved racial politics' is 'a kind of open field for Islanders to transform and claim in their own way'. One wonders how that field might also be open to the *mana* of Pacific women in Australia.

## Mana in New Age religions and video games

The chapters by Rachel Morgain and Alex Golub and Jon Peterson move *mana* into even more globalised spaces as it is appropriated as an energy or a life force possessed by individuals both in New Age religious movements and in the world of science fiction and video and computer games. The spectre of misrecognition and misappropriation haunts both these essays, although the authors approach this problem with notable subtlety.

Morgain argues that New Age understandings of *mana* were fundamentally shaped by early twentieth-century western philosophies, including psychoanalysis. Max Freedom Long's notion of 'three selves' parallels the Freudian distinction between id, ego and superego, and Wilhelm Reich's 'orgone energy', replete with metaphors of electricity, magnetism and flowing water, which is essentially accessed by individuals in processes of self-transformation. Many others subsequently diverted relational Polynesian philosophies into individualist projects to channel cosmic energies designed to transform the self. The appropriation of the Oceanic concept of *mana* in New Age religions has been scathingly criticised by writers like Lisa Kahaleole Hall as 'not Hawaiian' and as the sham practices of 'plastic shamans'. Morgain situates this critique in the broader context of the characterisation of New Age religions as promiscuously appropriating concepts from divergent times and places, but argues that seeing these practitioners as 'fake' is too simplistic. Still, they have surely shifted the shape of *mana* from a force in a relational collective field to a cosmic substance accessed by privileged individuals.

Alex Golub and Jon Peterson observe that those who invoke *mana* most frequently today are not Pacific peoples or anthropologists, but creators and players of video games. In the very popular *World of Warcraft*, played by about 10 million people worldwide, *mana* is a magical energy that druids, mages, paladins, shamans and warlocks can possess in different degrees. Reflecting on the earlier history of *mana's* travels, Golub and Peterson suggest that it was not just anthropologists who were fixated on the concept but the broader Victorian world of letters and scholars of comparative religion, in an intellectual genealogy that encompasses Müller, Mauss, Georges Dumézil, Mircea Eliade, J.R.R. Tolkien, Ernst Cassirer and Joseph Campbell. The countercultures of the 1960s and 1970s in the United States were profoundly influenced by the widely circulating paperback editions of Eliade and Tolkien. Fantasy fiction influenced science fiction writers, including Larry Niven, who claims that he first read about *mana* in Peter Worsley's *The Trumpet Shall Sound* (1968). The energy crises of the 1970s further produced competing visions of *mana* as a 'non-renewable' or 'renewable magic energy' in different games. Golub and Peterson suggest that anthropologists must reflect on their own subject position in a globalised world of cultural production. Just as they are engaging in dialogues with Pacific Islanders, anthropologists also need to

develop the same respectful dialogues with the expert fans and the independent intellectuals of popular global culture. They eschew questions of misappropriation or inauthenticity as the 'Austronesian concept' of *mana* again shifts its shape in the virtual world.

## Final words? Silences and substances

Words and utterances can be valuable commodities, but their worth as commodities is dependent on who controls them, who they are about, and who hears or overhears them. But language can also acquire value when it is interwoven with a host of other signs. Can its absence, in silence for example, just as easily be a symptom of *mana*? We are reminded of the *mana* of high chiefs in Tonga and Samoa, as well as many other parts of the Pacific, which resides in their impassive silence, as they let their attendants do the talking (*matāpule* or *tulāfale*, often awkwardly translated as 'talking chiefs'). Here, *mana* emanates from the stillness of high rank (compare Irvine 1990 on Senegal). Similarly, secrecy, concealment, avoidance, or indirection can all potentially act as sign-vehicles of powerful *mana*, as in the Hawaiian recognition of powerful *kaona* (hidden meanings) in the talk of *ali'i nui*.

This recognition helps us understand the transformations that *mana* has undergone in its travels with Christian conversion, catalysed by both European and Oceanic missionaries, and with colonial and indigenous state formation, as well as indigenous resistance and sovereignty. The arrival and subsequent localisation of Christianity are perhaps the quintessential contexts in which to explore the interdigitation of *mana* with changing ideologies of language, the truth, and humans' relationships to it (see also Keane 2006). In many parts of the Pacific, the *mana* of indigenous gods was in fact the focus of enormous anxiety for early missionaries, who, in their zeal to drain the efficacy of the gods, burnt, drowned or buried sacred manifestations in stone, wood or pandanus, even using sacred stones for the foundations of Christian church buildings, acts of incorporation of unequivocal iconic significance. There is no doubt that the passion of this iconoclastic desecration is situated in that longer history pitching Protestants against Catholics in the theology of transubstantiation and the Protestant attack on Catholic statues and relics, which, like Oceanic gods, were often seen to move and even

to weep. But there is evidence that, while these efforts were largely successful in replacing one cosmology with another, they did not completely annihilate the building blocks of the old cosmologies.

Observing this process, Tomlinson (2006) suggests that the historical and spatial transformations of *mana* have moved on an arc towards its greater substantivisation. He agrees with Keesing (1984) and Paul Geraghty, the doyen of Fijian linguistics, that *mana* is ‘canonically a verb in Fiji’ but that contemporary speakers frequently use it in its ‘nominalized and substantivized form’ (2006: 173). In contemporary discourse, the nominal use of *mana* is frequently adduced in discourses of cultural loss and the decline of chiefly power. A crucial key to these transformations is Christian conversion and the translation of the Fijian Bible, where *mana* denoted ‘miracles’ and was linked to the homophonous ‘manna’, the divine food that God gave the Israelites. Keesing failed to recognise the crucial significance of Christianity in the shape-shifting of *mana*, writing dismissively instead about Christianity (2006: 177) and passionately celebrating Kwaio ‘pagans’ in contrast to their Christian kin on Malaita.

But there is another aspect to this story that has perhaps not been sufficiently credited, namely the heavy engagement of indigenous missionaries from the eastern Pacific, particularly Tahitians, Rarotongans, Samoans and Tongans, in converting those further west. Keesing (1984) suggested that, in the Polynesian polities of Hawai‘i, Tahiti, the Marquesas and Māori Aotearoa/New Zealand, the formation of an hereditary aristocracy and dedicated theologians had occasioned a greater sense of *mana* as substantivised power, as a property of chiefs and gods. Tomlinson (2006) also suggests that Polynesian influences from Samoa and Tonga in eastern Fiji might have proved important in a more pronounced nominalisation and substantivisation of *mana*.

Much of the history of Christian missions has been unduly fixated on European missionaries and in particular martyrs such as John Williams, while indigenous missionaries have been referred to as ‘native teachers’, the dismissive term that European missionaries themselves employed in reference to them. But Polynesians often constituted the vanguard of evangelism and were central in the work of translation and conversion, especially in what were seen as the ‘dark and difficult’ mission fields of the west (Latai 2015, and many others). Witness the Samoans, men and women of the London Missionary Society in what

became Papua New Guinea and Vanuatu. So perhaps it was not only the more metaphysical renditions of *mana* by foreign missionaries but also the rather different Polynesian notions of *mana* that promoted an historical transformation in the western Pacific, even if the role of the latter remains largely unremarked.

Finally, we may ask what the relationship was between these new Christian cosmologies and the novel commodities of a globalising culture of capitalism. Christianities and commodities were not just simultaneous arrivals in the Oceanic world but were intimately entangled in dramatic transformations of Oceanic societies, transformations which gradually reshaped prevailing ideas of persons and things. Arguably, exposure to the commodities of global capitalism and to novel languages of property in persons and things might have facilitated a greater sense of *mana* as a substance or even a commodity (Silva, Tengan, Teaiwa, Morgain, Golub and Peterson, this volume). Such transformations connect dynamics in contemporary Oceania with those New Age religions and video games where *mana* becomes not just a powerful commodity but an increasingly individualised divine energy.

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