

From Reviled to Revered: Shifting Representations of Indigenous Medicines



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Preface

First and foremost, it must be stated that this paper is part of a larger project to research and critically review the ill effects on indigenous peoples, women, religious freedom, and the general well being of humanity by the imperial projects of Christianity and later, global capitalism. It is my belief that the imperial efforts made by the Roman Catholic Church and other Christian missionaries alike are large contributors to the inequality, intolerance, and injustices facing our world today. In the wake of this imperial project is the loss of indigenous, mystical, and metaphysical forms of spirituality, religion, science, medicine, resource management, agriculture, inter and intrapersonal relationships as well as the distortion of the human psyche. That being said, I do not purport that Christianity or Catholicism are at fault for this. Rather it is the driving forces and motivations that utilize said religions as a means to an end, which is generally self-serving. The effects of this expansion shape the world that we live in today, which is often a judgmental and unjust world at that. It is my belief that in order to determine how the individual, and society as a whole should conduct themselves in the future it becomes imperative to understand where we have been in the past.

This paper will focus on indigenous medicines and the interplay between the representations of indigenous medicine practitioners and the various empires that have used these representations in order to meet certain ends. Growing up in a Christian nation, but certainly in a different paradigm than “Christian America”, I have great trepidation about the growing prevalence of fanatical and fundamental religions across the world, and more specifically within the United States. The rise of overzealous attachment to literal translations of archaic text, and the utilization of such documentation

as justification for grotesque and violent behavior has, for many, brought the question of religion to the forefront of the public mind.

Furthermore, this paper is an investigation into one portion of a destructive paradigm that has seized the planet. In subsequent endeavors, I will be working towards describing how hetero-patriarchy and more specifically, hyper-hierarchy are what are truly behind the destruction of the human condition. This hyper-hierarchy has been spread and perpetuated through religion, and is currently taking form as ruthless capitalism.

Understanding how the takeover took place and how it continues to take place is the first step in abolishing the pattern as a whole. Through investigating the effects of forced conversion and capitalism on indigenous, medicinal knowledge, indigenous practitioners are one step closer to slowly unraveling the ropes that often have them bound and gagged. If they are able to reclaim what was lost without fear of ostracization from society, then perhaps they will also regain their voices.

Introduction

The expansion of empire is as American as apple pie. Its' origins lay in the pursuit of land and resources as well as the mission to convert the world to the dominant western religion of the day.

This paper will specifically examine the ways in which indigenous medicine men and women were represented by invading missionaries and explorers. The paper will then address the motivations of missionaries to construct specific representations of indigenous medicinal practices as “reviled” and how these representations were utilized

to further the Christian empire across the North American continent. Additionally, it will be discussed how the impacts these representations have on indigenous individuals today and how these impacts reinforce imperial and hegemonic power even long after the first contact with missionaries.

Furthermore, the contemporary commodification of indigenous knowledge will be introduced as a continuation of this type of exploitation. The utilization of indigenous medicinal representations still occurs in the contemporary world, though the tone has changed. Businesses are painting a much different picture than their missionary predecessors; it is an image of a “revered” indigenous medicine man rather than a savage heathen. Different from earlier motivations, these contemporary representations are not employed for furthering the Christian empire, but rather they are used to further the western capitalistic empire.

Indigenous Medicines

In order to set the tone of the paper, we will begin with a discussion on indigenous medicinal practices as described by indigenous individuals themselves.

Vine Deloria Jr. was a celebrated Native American scholar who helped reshape the discourse on Native American history, politics, science, religion, traditions, and representations. In his book entitled: *The World We Used to Live In: Remembering the Powers of the Medicine Man*, Deloria provides us with personal accounts of Native American medicinal and spiritual practices through several short interviews and stories.

One such healing practice is repeated throughout various different accounts. Vine Deloria recounts a story told to him:

A shaman dances up to a sick person in the audience, puts the top of the feather against the patient, and with the quill in his mouth sucks diligently for a moment. The feather seems to swell to a great size, as though some large object were passing through it. Then it resumes its natural size, the shaman begins to cough and choke, and directly with his hand draws from his mouth a large rag or a big stone, or a foot-long branch of the myriad-bristling buckhorn-cactus—while the patient feels vastly relieved after having such an unpleasant lodger removed from his cheek or neck or eye! (Deloria 2006, 62).

In the book, *Walking in the Sacred Manner: Healers, Dreamers, and Pipe Carriers—Medicine Women of the Plains Indians*, the authors recount a Lakota story of a medicine woman:

She performed a *Yagopa* [sucking] ceremony. First she sang a sacred song over the men. She then leaned over and sucked the poison from the men using a buffalo horn. Then she coughed up ugly green bile. It was thick and smelled awful. She did this for some time. Soon the swelling [of warrior's bodies who had been bitten by large serpents] went down, and it was clear that the men would live (St 1995, 58).

Along the same thread, the 1905 book: *The Myths of the New World* tells of healing practices of “North American Indians”(Brinton 1974, 147):

The quack [medicine man] muttered a formula over a gourd filled from a neighboring spring and sprinkled it on his patient, or washed the diseased part, or sucked out the evil spirit and blew it into a bowl of water...(Brinton 1974, 147)

Vine Deloria Jr. explains that when missionaries and European settlers started witnessing the vision quest, they felt it necessary to rationalize the activity through a western lens, through a frame of reference that they recognize and accept as truth.

In my own life I have witnessed two similar types of healings, both of which were carried out by my mother:

The first was performed on me in the year 2000. The area of my back above my kidneys had been aching for some time, I had kidney related dysfunction, and one evening the weight and pressure upon my lower back became unbearable. My mother had me lay face down and began to work on me. She utilized a lepidolite wand shaped crystal, as lepidolite is considered to be a useful stone for psychological ailments. As she lightly touched the point of the crystal to my left kidney I heard a crash and a thud. I quickly turned around to see my mother holding the bottom portion of the lepidolite wand in her hand, while the top portion lay broken on the floor. The crystal, with my mother's guidance, had absorbed the darkness that was congregating in my kidneys (the fear center of the body), and in a sacrificial gesture, burst in two. The top portion hit the beam of the ceiling and came crashing down to the floor. The pain in my kidneys was gone and the message from the crystal was thoroughly received. We promptly held a ritual for the crystal and thanked it for its sacrifice.

The second was performed on my father in 2001. He had been coughing and pounding his chest, with great pain in his rib that he attributed to a recent surf accident. After some hours, my mother suggested they go to the Emergency Room. On the way to the hospital my mother was intensely practicing *Tonglen*, a Tibetan Buddhist practice of taking on ones pain, sucking it up in essence, and returning to that person light and

compassion. Once at the hospital it was determined that my father was suffering a serious heart attack and was flown to Queen's Hospital for immediate surgery. Over the next week, my mother stayed with him while taking on his suffering. Once they returned home to Maui my mother noticed a large, hard lump in her breast and she went to the doctor immediately to have it examined. The doctor proceeded to take a standard core needle biopsy to have the tissue examined. But what arose from the sample was, according to the doctor, entirely abnormal and something he had never seen: a dark, thick, black fluid. He continued to draw the fluid out until there was nothing left in the growth. A portion was sent for examination and came back completely benign. Though the doctor was absolutely flummoxed, my mother knew exactly what had occurred. Clearly the severity of my father's ailment was so great that it had lodged itself in her breast until it was removed.

An additional, very significant practice quite often experienced and utilized by indigenous healers is the Vision Quest. Vine Deloria Jr. provides an explanation: "A person would go to an isolated location and fast and pray for a number of days (usually four) or until there had been some contact with another entity" (Deloria 2006, 17). There are several stories that describe vision quests and the messages that come through them. Lame Deer, a Brule Sioux medicine man explains the general experience of the vision quest:

Imagine a darkness so intense, and so complete that it is almost solid, flowing around you like ink, covering you like a velvet blanket. A blackness which cuts you off from the everyday world, which forces you to withdraw deep into yourself, which makes you see with your heart instead of your eyes. You can't see, but your

eyes are opened. You are isolated, but you know that you are part of the Great Spirit, united with all living beings (Deloria 2006, 20).

Though their religion contains similar acts of miracle healings and visions, such as the Miracles of Jesus Christ, and Moses and the Burning Bush, missionaries and European settlers discounted these entirely legitimate, indigenous medicinal practices. Out of fear of the unknown, and I would argue manifest destiny, missionaries painted indigenous medicine as animistic, pagan, vile, and evil. To have a continent occupied by heathen savages as opposed to evolved scientists provided the much-needed justification for converting new souls, while expanding the Christian empire westward and beyond.

Early Representations

It must be recognized that early accounts of indigenous peoples, whether by explorers or missionaries were, for the most part all similarly judgmental and degrading. This was not only applied to the religious practices of those they encountered but to basic developmental psychology as well. It is important to understand this interaction first in order to be aware of the representations provided by “anthropologists” and the likes, which the missionaries themselves were dealing with often before confronting the heathens. These anthropological accounts provided by French philosopher and anthropologist Lucien Lévy-Bruhl of the early 20th century, are clearly not from the first interactions with indigenous peoples in the Americas. But they do provide a good insight as to how the European mind was conceptualizing the native/savage and therefore how they perceived of themselves.

I, on the other hand, propose to determine which are the most general laws governing collective representations in the **most undeveloped peoples known to us**" (Lévy- Bruhl 1966, 15).

It would be idle to institute any comparison between the discursive processes of **prelogical mentality and those of our thought**, to look for any correspondence between the two, for we should have no grounds on which to base a hypothesis...The discursive operations of our rational thought—the analysis of which has been made familiar to us through psychology and logic—require the existence and the employment of much that is intricate, in the form of categories, concepts, and abstract terms. They also assume an intellectual functioning...In short, **they imply an ensemble of conditions which we do not find existing anywhere in social aggregates of a primitive type** (Lévy- Bruhl 1966, 105).

To Christian missionaries, the medicinal, spiritual, and overall way of life of American Indians was considered to be a sort of “animism” (Lévy- Bruhl 1966, 18), and this animism was considered to be inferior and primitive. The highly complex knowledge base and technologies that were employed by American Indians were often completely disregarded and interpreted as devil worship. An example of one such false impression is that of the dream vision as relayed by Professor Lucien Lévy-Bruhl (emphasis added):

“In the first place, the primitive, surprised and moved by apparitions which present themselves in his dreams...believes in the objective reality of these representations...This belief would be universal among primitives, because all would be subject to the **psychological self-delusion** in which it originated. In the second place, when they want to account for the natural phenomena...and assign a cause to them, they immediately apply and generalize the explanation they have accepted of their dreams and hallucination....**It is a simple and artless logical process, but not less spontaneous nor less inevitable to the “primitive” mind,**

than the psychological illusion, which preceded it and upon which it is based (Lévy- Bruhl 1966, 18).

Thus without any attempt at reflection, by the mere influence of mental processes which are the same to all, **the primitive develops a “philosophy” of his own, childish, and clumsy**, no doubt, but yet perfectly consistent with itself. (Lévy- Bruhl 1966, 18-19)

In *Missions, Missionaries, and Native Americans*, the author, Maria F. Wade describes the relationships and interaction between Jesuit and Franciscan missionaries in what is now North America and Mexico. The shamanistic practices of American Indians were very similar in many ways to that of the missionaries. For instance, Christians taking the body and blood of Christ during communion was somewhat paralleled in the practice of Shamans taking in the “ashes or body parts of relatives to embody and honor them”(Wade 2008, 27). The shamans recognized these similarities and parallels between the cultures and acknowledged them. In order to possibly create an environment of better understanding, Wade argues that shamans may have adopted and utilized Christian terminology within their own practice, though the true intentions of the shamans are unclear. It is possible that they were simply making a mockery of the missionaries or they may have been incorporating more than just language, and adopting entire concepts such as the Christian devil into their own practice. Because of the missionary preoccupation and obsession with “wickedness” (Wade 2008, 30) and “evilness” (Wade 2008, 31), any utilization of the Christian devil within shamanistic practice sent the missionaries into religious fervor. The missionaries were “...convinced that the powers of the shaman were derived from the devil...” (Wade 2008, 29). There was a potent rhetoric employed by the

missionaries that emphasized evilness and debauchery when reporting on the practices of indigenous people. This is clearly demonstrated in *The New England Company 1649-1776*:



In this seventeenth-century illustration, a demon hovers above an Iroquois longhouse, expressing the French Jesuit Joseph-François Lafitau's sense that Native religion was subject to Satan and addicted to the dark arts. Other European colonists, whether Catholic or Protestant, clergy or laity, shared such a view. (Joseph-François Lafitau, *Moeurs des sauvages américains comparées aux mœurs des premier temps*, 4 vols. [Paris, 1724], II: 58. Image courtesy of the Lilly Library, Indiana University.)

It is well known to you that you have a body of Indians within the very bowels of your Colony, who to this day ly perishing in horrid ignorance and wickedness, devoted vassals of Satan, unhappy strangers to the only Saviour (Kellaway 1961, 251).

(Dennis 2003)

I do not believe that Doctor Dall's conception of Shamanism is correct. The shaman of an Eskimo tribe is quite naturally regarded by the white observer as an imposter (Harrison 1905, 32)

Thus began, in 1894, missionary Tollef Larson Brevig's fight against the shamanism of Alaska's Seward Peninsula. Viewing shamanism as demon worship and "Eskimo superstition," Brevig set out to break what he considered the **power of darkness and evil**, and to replace the hopelessness he saw

with faith in the Christian gospel. The Lutheran Brevig found an ally against the shamans in the Roman Catholic Bellarmine La Fortune who, for his part, knew them to have “**intercourse with his satanic majesty**” and to be “unscrupulous charlatans” (Jorgenson 1990, 339).

“Yes, I gave myself to your God. I do no more witch doctoring. It is a good thing Native people do not have shamans with us any more. White people would have no chance to bother us because it would be easy for us to do our crimes with our false spirits” (Jorgenson 1990, 347).

Their religious ideas are easily described...Their belief in witchcraft, their medicine-men and jugglery, their various dances, are, in the main, such as are found in almost every American tribe (Shea 1969, 99).

The representations painted of American Indians would not be complete without some insight as to how the missionaries themselves were viewed by those writing the history. The following is an excerpt, which describes Spanish Fransiscan Missionary, Juniper Serra who had developed several missions throughout the western, and northwestern portion of the American continent.

Among the enterprising men who have attempted the conversion of the Indians, few deserve a higher place than Father Juniper Serra. Nothing is more admirable than the courage he displayed in the effort to civilize the barbarous tribes, amid whom his charity had called him. If he had not the heroic sanctity...constant attention, assiduous labor...entitle him to the highest place among illustrious missionaries (Shea 1969, 102).

Another excerpt describes the beauty of the land the missionaries were settling and puts into perspective the way missionaries viewed the Indians.

Its founder, the illustrious Father Peyri, raised a thatched cottage by the beautiful banks of the San Luis on the feast of his patron, Saint Anthony of Padua, in the year 1798. A few cattle and some converted Indians were all that he asked from the next mission...” (Shea 1969, 108)

This unfortunate juxtaposition of American Indians to livestock is repeated:

At this period, the missions contained 30,560 Indians, 424,000 head of cattle, 62,500 horses, 321,500 sheep, and raised annually 122,500 bushels of wheat and maize. (Shea 1969, 112)

In the book *Navajo Witchcraft* by anthropologist Clyde Kuckhohn (1905-1960), a certain level of obsession comes to light. Indeed, the title is *Navajo Witchcraft*, which implies sorcery and other forms of ethereal work. Due to the nature of medicinal work, one would imagine that with so many accounts of sorcerers, there would be examples of healings, medicinal use of plants, and so on. Yet, what the overwhelming majority of Kuckhohn’s observations were on: murder, crime, sex, debauchery, incest, revenge, hedonism, prostitution, and generally socially deviant behavior. Following are but a minute sampling of the language and stories utilized throughout Kuckhohn’s book.

When witch people get together they talk about things. One person will say to another man, “When I was out there...one man got mad at me or one woman. And what I want to do about that man or woman. I want to kill that man”. One reason the other witches will be glad to kill this man is after they kill him, they’ll make more medicine, fresh medicine...**If they kill a woman, a good woman**, they’ll bring her down here inside the Hogan and one man can have intercourse with her. Maybe two, maybe three, **maybe all of them can have intercourse with her** (Kluckhohn 1967, 133-134)

Witchery people carry around bad stuff. They put a piece on a stick and throw it at you. Or they throw the stick at night...on people while they are sleeping. They grind up human flesh and mix it up with other stuff and makes poison. Children's flesh is best(Kluckhohn 1967, 136-137).

Witches as were-animals meet at night to plan concerted action against victims, to initiate new members, to have intercourse with dead women, to practice cannibalism, to kill victims at a distance by ritualized practices...The Witches sit in a circle surrounded by piles or baskets of corpse flesh...rows of identifiable human heads were likewise stored in the cave. The Witches are naked save for masks and many beads...their bodies are painted in a fashion reminiscent of that carried out in ceremonials...leading Witches are thought of as rich, but they are assisted by a class of menial "helpers", and these are said to be poor—so poor that sheer self-preservation demands that they "work for" the Witches. (Kluckhohn 1967, 27)

Kluckhohn organizes different methods of magic into four categories:

"Witchery", "Sorcery", "Wizardry", and "Frenzy Witchcraft" (Kluckhohn 1967, 22). It should not be assumed that the terms witch, sorcerer, and wizard generally have negative connotations. Yet in conjunction with the content of Kluckhohn's book it is clear that he is not utilizing the terms fondly. I go into such detail with the accounts above in order to emphasize the imagery that is being provided, being created, and being published about Navajo medicine men and women. Clearly this type of imagery serves multiple functions:

- It helps to reinforce white supremacy by demonizing indigenous practices,
- Which therefore thrusts many indigenous peoples, encroached upon by missions, into fear for practicing certain cultural rites.
- It further demeans an established nation of peoples so as to make the invasion and theft of their land justified as if they are barbaric forest

animals that need to be domesticated.

- It subjugates and objectifies women.
- It sells. The graphic violence, drama, and sex help to make a book that potentially only anthropologists would read, much more interesting to the general public.
- The sub-text, that which remains unsaid, paints a clear picture of what the American Indians are not: civilized, clean, polite, kind, controlled, human.
- Finally, it is an absolute Freudian projection. By suppressing and denying ones desires and actions and projecting on to another group, the denial becomes much easier.

To expand upon this psychoanalysis I turn to Terry Eagleton's *Literary Theory* and his discussion on Freud. Eagleton described Freud's theory of "projection" as follows: "...the ascribing to others the feelings and wishes which are actually our own" (Eagleton 1983, 138). Psychological projection is a defense mechanism that serves the function of protecting the ego from feeling more undesirable emotions such as guilt. Projection is similar to denial, but goes further than denial and actually ascribes ones own feelings of guilt, shame, anger, depression or any plethora of emotions, to another individual. In the case of missionary and other western interpretations of indigenous peoples, it is my belief that many early representations of indigenous peoples are actually reflections of how the missionaries et al., feel about themselves as a group and their actions as a group on an unconscious level. Because these self-reflections are less than desirable, such as the internal realization that invading another people's nation, enslaving them, and infecting them with deadly disease is unbearable to admit to oneself, the

barbaric qualities are projected onto those that they are murdering. A classic psychological self defense mechanism becomes very dangerous when employed and applied to large groups of people. Many of the psychoses attributed to American Indians in early encounters are clearly manifestations of typical repressive behavior found in Judeo-Christian religions. Using the excerpts provided above it is clear that the ways in which indigenous peoples are represented are extremely fantastical, extravagant and over the top with a certain theatrical element to them.

The question of why people would sail across perilous seas and make long, difficult journeys simply in the hopes of converting lost souls to a single religion, is quite honestly beyond me. I have been in pursuit of the answer as to how manifest destiny can be so alluring and have yet to come up with a definitive understanding of such a delusion.

Once arrived in a “new” territory, why would foreigners go to such great lengths in order to re-create and re-write a history? If one employs a Constructionist view, and takes a Semiotic approach, the power or re-writing of history becomes much more clear. According to Ferdinand de Saussure and Roland Barthes if one changes the signification (representations, images, sign/signifiers) of something, such as an indigenous group then the meaning of that indigenous group is therefore changed. By changing the meaning of an entire people through manipulating the symbols that represent them, it becomes easier to also change the power dynamic between those being represented and those doing the representing. With those that are doing the representing in control and those being represented stripped of governmental control the management of public opinion then lies in the hands of the oppressive regime. Why does a change in public opinion matter? It matters because it is public opinion that shapes the actions of the majority. If indigenous

peoples, their practices, and those items they hold sacred are represented as barbaric, simplistic, and primitive then the majority that is influenced by public opinion will treat those individuals as primitive barbarians.

The motivations are illuminated when one asks the question, who is the audience for these representations? For whom are these accounts written? As Roland Barthes explains, what are the connotations implied within the chosen language in these accounts? The accounts and representations of indigenous people were never intended to be read or reviewed by indigenous peoples themselves. The targeted audience was Europe and new potential missionaries and settlers. The images painted allowed for good Christians to travel to the New World and save the souls of the wicked and weak. Yet if this were the only motivation, the representations would have been much different, not necessitating such drama and theater. Not only did the image of a “savage native” give the Christian reason to save souls, it gave the European Christian the duty to travel abroad and become a shameless voyeur and bear witness to all their own latent and repressed desires.

Indigenous Medicines Co-opted

“The motive of human society is in the last resort and economic one.” (Eagleton 2008, 131).



“We are heirs, we have become a part of this story. And I gotta’ tell you, we cannot think of the history of Noni without feeling emotionally tied to every single person and event that has taken place since you know, 4,000 to 5,000 years ago when it first became noticed by man.”

- Kelly Olsen, Former President, Tahitian Noni International
current Vice President, Morinda Holdings, Inc.

Tahitian Noni international is the largest distributor of Noni based products in the world. Sold primarily as a health food supplement, Tahitian Noni International operations are based on multi-level-marketing, which has proven to be quite economically lucrative for many involved. According to a video provided on their website: “On average worldwide it takes less than two seconds for the next bottle of Tahitian Noni juice to be

sold worldwide.” John Wadsworth, the founder of Tahitian Noni International is pictured here, a modern day Noni-Colombus, charioted in his own Santa Maria, a Jeep to be exact, discovering Tahitian Noni in the depths of the Marquesan jungle and bringing its mystical healing properties to masses.

Million Dollar Bonus

WHAT WOULD YOU DO WITH ONE MILLION DOLLARS?
Qualify as a member of TNI's Bora Bora Club and you'll earn one of the biggest cash bonus payouts in industry history—ONE MILLION DOLLARS!

How to qualify:
Become a Black Pearl with 7 or more personally sponsored, fully qualified Black Pearls for 4 quarters.

You'll also receive:

- Diamond ring or pendant
- Key to the company
- Top available-class travel and accommodations for two to all TNI events

Clearly much of the rhetoric and sentiment with regards to representing indigenous geography and natural environment has stayed the same throughout history: large, vast, open landscapes full of abundance and lucrative resources ready for the taking. The fearless explorer sacrifices all that is dear to him in order to pursue the New World, of Noni. Then, just as our hero may have lost all hope, in an overwhelmingly romantic moment replete with tropical sunsets and virgin jungle, it's as if God himself has shone the light onto the answer: fields of rogue Noni trees thick and plump, moist and full, ready and waiting.

From this moment on it was virtually ordained that “The

gift of Noni had been handed to a new generation and a new set of stewards”¹, namely, John Wadsworth and his soon to be business partners. It was incumbent upon John to assure that everyone around the world had access to the magical Noni fruit, not only for their bodies and spirit, but for their pocketbooks as well:

A MODERN DISCOVERY

John traveled to Tahiti, where he searched for and gathered any type of information he could find regarding noni. He spoke with native Tahitians on the street and in their homes, and he listened to dozens of accounts and stories about the uses and health benefits of noni.

John also sought out traditional Tahitian health practitioners who had firsthand knowledge of generations-old traditions, and who had preserved the noni fruit's ancient health secrets.

But John quickly realized that there simply weren't enough noni trees in Tahiti to support a large commercial operation. So he set out to discover a more abundant supply.

Eventually, John leveraged everything he had in order to travel to the Marquesas Islands in French Polynesia, where he'd been told there was a limitless supply of noni. His search yielded only discouragement—until the day before he was to leave.

During an inner-island search by jeep, John and his guide crested a ridge on one side of yet another beautiful valley. The sun was just setting, and its rays were now falling on the broad, green leaves of tens of thousands of noni trees.

In a transcendent moment, John realized he had finally located the noni source he'd been searching for.



¹ Tahitian Noni International. <http://www.tni.com> (accessed December 1st, 2009).

Welcome to your new life...

People all over the world have transformed their lives with the help of Tahitian Noni International.

Some of the reasons people are joining Tahitian Noni:

- Tahitian Noni has created nearly 200 millionaires
- TAHITIAN NONI Juice® is proven to improve your well-being
- Tahitian Noni has paid over \$2 billion in commissions
- You can earn luxury trips, cars, and did we mention cash bonuses!

Kava: *Piper Methysticum* is a root that is believed to have been domesticated in Vanuatu. Typically the rhizome (root) of the plant is harvested, ground into a powder and

Indigenous and Non-Western Use/Significance/Relationships:

Medicine:

Indigenous Group: Groups in the Pacific Islands in Polynesia, Micronesia, Melanesia; in: Hawaii, Vanuatu, Pohnpei, Samoa, Fiji, Tahiti

Part Used: Rootstalk/rhizome

Medicinal Actions: aphrodisiac, narcotic, antiseptic, analgesic, soporific, diuretic, laxative, galactagogue, anesthetic, diaphoretic

Indications: arthritis, pain, sleeplessness, inflammation of urogenital system, gonorrhea and chronic cystitis, difficulties in urinating, female puberty symptoms and weakness, menstrual problems, vaginal prolapsus, to provoke abortion, migraines related to women's sicknesses, headaches, general weakness, chills, sleeping problems, infection prevention, rheumatism, weight gain, gastrointestinal upsets, irritation of respiratory tract, pulmonary pains, tuberculosis.

Preparation: Pounding, mashing, chewing rhizome and soaking in cold water. Mastication of the roots is typically used in Vanuatu and Papua New Guinea [8, 181]. One method is to chew the root, add water to four or five mouthfuls of the chewed root, and to strain it. Another method is to dry the root, wash it, chop it, then either chew or pound it, and then add it to water and heat it.

Applications: Infusion – hot or cold

Parts Used: Rootstalk/rhizome

Medicinal Actions: Leprosy, skin diseases

Preparation: Masticated stump

Application: Poultice [2, 113]

Parts Used: Juice obtained from fresh leaves

Medicinal Actions: Otitis, Abscess

Application: Taken orally [8, 185]

Cautions: Excessive overconsumption will cause photophobia and diplopia, temporary oculomotor paralysis, skin lesions, and exanthema. Skin lesions will go away with the reduced or discontinued use of kava.

Other: Social beverage, also used in ceremonies, rituals, and for spiritual purposes. It was offered to gods and the spirits of ancestors, and the plant is seen as a link to ancestors. Rats and pigs have been often seen chewing kava roots. It is a symbol of forgiveness in Futuna and Samoa. There are many myths about the origin of kava, and they often include women, death, and animals.

prepared with water for consumption. The root is also chewed. Kava has a soothing, relaxing and mildly psychoactive quality (Lebot 1999, 3) and is botanically classified as a narcotic. Following is a sample of the indigenous medicinal applications of Kava:

(Pyrooz 2006, 2-3)



The calming effects and diversity of Kava have not gone unnoticed by Pharmaceutical companies. Traditionally, the root is prepared and consumed with certain protocol and has medicinal, political, religious/ceremonial, and social applications. Though Kava has not been restricted to solely religious purposes, the root maintains a certain reverence among those that utilize, recognize and respect it. Yet in the past decade the sale of Kava supplements

have increased significantly. There are several complications that arise when using a sacred substance for the sole purpose of creating capital. One of the most sobering ramifications of the appropriation and misuse of Kava by pharmaceutical companies were the deaths of consumers: “2007 Kava Kava Report links 7 deaths and 14 liver transplants to the use of Kava.”²

Traditional kava drinkers discard the peelings, but Tang and his team learned from a trader in Fijian kava that European pharmaceutical companies eagerly bought up the peelings when demand for kava extract soared in Europe in 2000 and 2001. “Peelings are traditionally avoided by the kava drinkers with good reason,” Tang said. “If you don't respect the

² Saunders and Walker, Attorneys at Law. <http://kavaliverlawsuit.com/2007-Kava-Kava-Report.html> (accessed December 1st, 2009).

traditional use or people who learn by experience, if you don't respect that, you might get yourself in trouble.”³

Just this year more deaths occurred due to the co-option of another very sacred, indigenous medicinal practice; the sweat lodge.

(CNN) -- An investigation into the deaths of two people who spent up to two hours inside a "sweat lodge" at an Arizona retreat last week has been elevated from an accidental death investigation to a homicide inquiry, Yavapai County Sheriff Steve Waugh told reporters Thursday.⁴



Sweat lodges conducted for \$50, peyote meetings for \$1,500, medicine drums for \$300, weekend workshops and vision quests for \$500, two do-it-yourself practitioners smothered in their own sweat lodge—the interest in American Indian spirituality only seems to grow and manifests itself in increasingly bizarre behavior by both Indians and non-Indians (Deloria 2006, xvii).

³ The Honolulu Advertiser. <http://the.honoluluadvertiser.com/article/2003/Apr/07/ln/ln03a.html> (accessed December 1st, 2009).

⁴ CNN.com. <http://www.cnn.com/2009/US/10/15/arizona.sweat.lodge/index.html> (accessed December 1st, 2009).

As demonstrated above, there are serious consequences for not only the indigenous peoples from which these medicinal practices have been appropriated, but also for the end user. The ultimate consequence, as we have seen results in death.

Effects of Representations

The perpetuation of historical stereotypes has a very real and often very damaging effect on indigenous peoples today.

...I was in my daughter's classroom, correcting papers in the back of the room. The class was reading *The Courage of Sarah Noble*, and I saw my daughter squirming in her seat. So I picked up the book and saw why. As she was heading out for recess, she started to cry and told me that the kids were making fun of her and no one wanted to play with her because she was Indian. I remember she said, "Mom, the other kids won't play with me. They think what they read in the book is the way Indians are." She said they were making fun of her, saying, "Oh, she's an Indian, she's gonna scalp us and peel our skin off like the Indians in the book." All I could do was hold my daughter. I remembered reading books like this when I was her age, and I remembered my own pain (Seale 2005, excerpt as reprinted on website: www.oyate.org).

Not only does the cooption of indigenous medicines, particularly for capital gain, undermine the sacredness and intention of that practice, it works to reinforce the disappearing of indigineity.

With regards to the disappearing of Indigenous Peoples it becomes very evident through the eyes of children what narratives have been painted by society as whole for them to believe as reality. A study conducted by The League of Women Voters in St. Paul Minnesota demonstrates their sentiments:

When asked if they had even seen an American Indian, only 16 kindergarteners (6%) and 31 fifth graders (13%) indicated they had seen one in person. (Hirschfelder 1999, 3)

The foundation for these sentiments is laid down through the historical representations of indigenous peoples. But it is important to recognize that these narratives are constantly reinforced by the re-telling of a hegemonic and imperial history as well as the recreations of said representations in popular culture.

Contemporary re-representations of indigenous peoples, particularly spiritual representations, reinforce the stereotypes created by non-indigenous peoples. This effectively freezes the evolution of indigenous peoples and forces them to either abandon their indigeneity and completely assimilate into western hegemony, or fulfill some fictitious stereotype. This frustration is expressed through art posted on a blog at: angryindian.blogspot.com:



Conclusion

It is clear that the representations of indigenous people and their cultural practices as described by missionaries and anthropologists are extremely skewed and extravagant digressions from reality. The accounts that come from original and early encounters of Europeans to the American continent are so outlandish that they would be laughable if it weren't for the terrible violence that resulted from those encounters.

Moving to contemporary representations, there is no avoiding that the utilization of indigenous elements is done in order to sell more products rather than offer a platform for the education of indigenous knowledge.

Whether it is the duty of European missionaries to save the souls of savage Indians around the world and spread the word of the Bible, or the duty of American businessmen to save the health of everyone around the world and spread the knowledge of a magical Polynesian fruit, it is clear that both are means to the same end: empire. These misrepresentations are extremely harmful not only to the integrity of history, but also to the well being of indigenous people today. Fabricated and elaborate stories about “natives” (from the past, and those that continue to be created) serve several functions:

- Perpetuate the exploitation of indigenous peoples and their knowledge
- It arrests the evolution of indigenous peoples today, forcing them to either live through these fabricated representations as primitive relics of the past or to abandon their indigeneity and assimilate to dominant culture.
- There is no “modern native.”

- Irresponsible and widespread use of these representations allows for the cooption of indigenous knowledge by non-indigenous individuals and groups, perpetuating and solidifying the imperial project.
- Lies become truth

Though the signification (the representations) of indigenous medicines have changed; from earlier interpretations as being reviled to contemporary interpretations as being revered, the motivations have remained the same...the representations are never created for the sake of the those being represented. These representations are created in order to see what indigenous people have to offer and what their indigeneity can provide for missionaries and settlers in order to continually reinforce European/Christian empire.

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