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Hollywood Westerns and the Pacific: John Kneubuhl and *The Wild Wild West*

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In the mid to early twentieth century Pacific, Hollywood westerns and their signature trope, the cowboy, were extremely popular (Pearson 157-160). Whereas the cinematic cowboy's popularity outside of the United States might once have been considered simply more evidence of Hollywood's imperialist dominance, contemporary scholars have focused instead upon the complex contradiction his popularity represents (Meeuf 272-284; Salesa, "Cowboys in the House" 330-332; Somerville 663-664, 673-677). At least in theory, the western's unwavering commitment to hegemonic white masculinity and U.S. colonial domination should have alienated rather than appealed to audiences in the Pacific. However, in Samoa, Tonga, and New Zealand, audiences clearly preferred westerns (Keesing and Keesing 166; Keesing 441) identifying closely with celluloid cowboys rather than the cinematic Indians with whom these audiences arguably had much more in common historically and socio-politically. Scholars working in Central Africa where cowboys were similarly popular (Ambler 133-157; Burns 103-117; Gondola 76-77; Reynolds 399-419), attribute the western's appeal to its capacity to express and mitigate inequality with transcendent masculinity and cosmic justice (Powdermaker 254). Similar reasons seem to account for the genre's popularity in the Pacific (Pearson 156-157).

The paradox presented by avid transnational consumption of white masculinity on remote islands at the end of Hollywood's distribution chain is not the only way in which westerns and Pacific communities inter-related. John Kneubuhl, a writer of Samoan and German-American descent born and raised in American Samoa and subsequently educated

in the United States, wrote screenplays for almost forty television series including many influential westerns such as *Gunsmoke*, *Wagon Train*, *Have Gun Will Travel*, and *The Wild Wild West*. Eventually disillusioned with his work in Los Angeles, Kneubuhl abruptly returned to American Samoa in the late sixties where he embarked upon a new career in bilingual education and returned to writing plays. By any measure, Kneubuhl's Hollywood career was extremely successful, but he personally dismissed much of his television writing as mere "craft" and a distraction from his "real" work (Vought 193). As a consequence, critics have paid far more attention to his groundbreaking community theatre work in Honolulu during the forties (Carroll and Carroll 58-60) and the postcolonially incisive plays he wrote in the seventies and eighties (Hereniko 99-100; Sinavaiana Gabbard 217-230). Nevertheless, Kneubuhl's mid-century television work can and should be seen as a continuation of his preoccupation with hybridity, alienation, and ambivalence. In particular, his characterization of one of *The Wild Wild West*'s most infamous villains, the diminutive Miguelito Loveless, expressed Kneubuhl's deep sense of conflict about the transcendent masculinity of the cinematic cowboy and the colonial consolidation that westerns represent more generally. In this instance a relatively "run of the mill" series noted primarily for its steampunk characteristics (Miller and Van Riper 187), expressed postcolonial Pacific sentiment from a Polynesian artist writing back to Hollywood, not from the experimental or independent margins about misrepresenting the South Seas, but from inside the industry strategically using the most significant genre of the century.

The Wild Wild West

The Wild Wild West is perhaps best remembered as "James Bond on horseback." Devised specifically to capitalize on the rising fortunes of the spy genre while catering to the western's still sizeable audience (Boddy 131), the series featured James T. West (Robert Conrad) and his partner Artemus Gordon (Ross Martin) as special agents for the administration of Ulysses S. Grant (1869-1877). West was a suave ladies man, good with his fists and fast on the draw, whereas Gordon was a master of disguise and a sophisticated technical specialist. Over four seasons, the crime-fighting duo faced many villains, but the most nefarious and memorable was undeniably Miguelito Quixote Loveless.

Loveless was three feet ten inches of postcolonial malevolence, driven primarily by a compulsion to reclaim the vast estates confiscated by the

United States Government from his Mexican grandmother in the aftermath of the 1846-1848 Mexican American War. In his first television appearance, he conspired to use a powerful explosive of his own devising to kill five thousand innocent Americans a day until the U.S. government repatriated his property. Alternately charming and hostile, sensitive and merciless, capricious and considered, Loveless was nevertheless always erudite and inventive. He was also a figure of pathos because he desperately longed to be respected and admired. Time after time he would be undone by hubris. West and Gordon would simply treat him dismissively by ignoring him. Unable to restrain himself, Loveless would invariably boast about his intricately detailed crimes and gloat about his technological genius. The agents would then have enough information to thwart his villainy. Accompanied by the harpsichord playing Antoinette with whom Loveless would sing surreal duets, and his mute seven foot two inch henchman Voltaire, the mixed race, deformed Loveless was the ultimate outsider. He directed his fury and anguish at a world that privileged everything the handsome and heroic James West stood for: whiteness, American colonial authority, and effortless physical, sexual and social masculine mastery.

Kneubuhl was responsible for writing five of the ten episodes Loveless appeared in. It might seem dubious to focus on such a narrow selection of a series that comprised nearly one hundred episodes, especially given the changing nature of television authorship in the early sixties. Kraszewski describes the change as a shift from an artisanal, authorial model of writing to one that was more explicitly Fordist:

In order to manage producing 39 episodes per season, producers outlined the characters, their drives, possible plots, and story parameters within a series proposal and then distributed it to staff writers. Dramatic writers now had to execute the vision of a producer, who sometimes went as far as to give writers episode outlines and asked them simply to supply dialogue. This shift in the television production process robbed dramatic writers of their ability to structure narrative, develop characters, and choose genres. Writers went from being the architects of the storytelling process to people who were given a blueprint and asked to build a product that someone else designed. (348)

Despite intensifying creative constraints, there is ample evidence that Kneubuhl played a key creative role in devising Loveless and crafting the signature characteristics of the villain's most memorable storylines.

In 1964, agent turned producer Michael Garrison pitched a series concept he called “James Bond in the West” to his friend Hunt Stromberg, then Head of Programming at CBS. [1] Intrigued by the premise, Stromberg asked Ethel Winant, then Associate Director of Program Development, to flesh out the idea. In an interview accompanying the DVD collection of the first season of *The Wild Wild West*, Winant says she added the nineteenth century setting and the title character James West. Veteran television writer Gilbert Ralston wrote the series pilot adding much of the show’s gadgetry and West’s sidekick Artemus Gordon (Crick 5-6). From its inception, *The Wild Wild West* was creatively complicated and financially ambitious. Garrison understood the show’s wacky hybridity but he had little experience producing network television. The series featured elaborate sets and props, practical special effects and complex action sequences that Robert Conrad insisted on doing himself. Unable or perhaps unwilling to scale the series back to keep production costs down, Garrison found himself in constant tension with CBS who initially “promoted” him to Executive Producer in an effort to remove him from day to day operations, and then tried to fire him altogether. Neither tactic succeeded and Garrison returned to produce the show in its second season, but not before a chaotic revolving door of producers and writers had been associated with the series. By the end of its first season *The Wild Wild West* had seven producers and twenty-six writers (Crick 14). Without Garrison’s direct involvement the series initially foundered. Fred Freiberger, the show’s second producer approached freelance television writer John Kneubuhl to help salvage a problematic episode and devise a narrative element that would set *The Wild Wild West* apart from its prime time competition. In an oral history Kneubuhl recorded in Samoa twenty years after he retired from television writing, he describes the creation of the villainous Miguelito Loveless as alcohol fuelled serendipity:

I wasn’t very sober incidentally ... but I was sitting there in the producers (sic) office and he [Fred Freiberger] was out ... for a moment ... and just by coincidence there was a copy of *Time Magazine* open and on the open page was a picture of Michael Dunn the dwarf, so I poured myself another drink and waited for Fred to come back and I said, “Fred, if you can get him, I’ll do your series.” And that’s how the villain dwarf for the Wild Wild West started. (121)

John Kneubuhl and Miguelito Loveless

Loveless may have been created on an alcoholic whim, but Kneubuhl acknowledged that they shared a residual slow burning anger over colonial dispossession and a sense of profound alienation. In his oral history Kneubuhl describes his unique position as a television writer:

The ... difference between me and, not all, but most of the commercial television writers is, the dwarf was a brilliant enough stroke, and see counting on my half-caste side I said ok fine those lousy palagis came and stole all my mother's land away from her so we hate 'em. So Miguelito Loveless, the palagis, gringos came and stole all his Mexican mother's, stole Texas, and New Mexico and of course that was all Miguelito's family's land... [2]

Kneubuhl himself was of mixed ancestry which is often referred to by Samoans as "half-caste" or *'afakasi*. He was born in American Samoa in 1920 to Benjamin Kneubuhl, a German-American from Iowa, and Atalina Pritchard who belonged to a well-connected Samoan family. [3] John spent the early years of his life moving between his Samoan family's compound in the village of Leone and his father's store in Fagotogo. In Leone, John was allowed more freedom than in town (Kneubuhl 34-35, 82) although he acknowledges that his Samoan family's sense of superior social status sometimes restricted his ability to play with his peer group (Kneubuhl 3). A creative and precocious but sickly child, John was not sent away to Honolulu to attend Punahou School at age five or six as his older brothers James and Ben had been. Instead he attended a local school run by the Catholic brothers until he was thirteen. He therefore spent some of his formative childhood years on the far flung frontier of the American empire, living in what he describes as two distinct but interrelated worlds: one Samoan and the other American.

Critics describe Kneubuhl's sense of living in two worlds as a feature of the borderland. Typically produced at the juncture of two or more cultures that share geographic territory (Rosaldo 207-208), borderlands refer to the politics, histories, psychologies and sexualities of multicultural, multiracial milieus often produced by the forces of modernity (Clifford). Gloria Anzaldúa's evocative description of her borderland between the U.S. and Mexico hints at the dynamics at work in Kneubuhl's American Samoan childhood while explicitly addressing the Loveless character. She writes that at the border between the U.S. and Mexico,

the Third World grates against the first and bleeds. And before a scab forms it hemorrhages again, the lifeblood of two worlds merging to form a third country – a border culture... Borders are set up to define the spaces that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish *us* from *them*.... A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition. The prohibited and the forbidden are its inhabitants. *Los atravesados* live here: the squint-eyed, the perverse, the queer, the troublesome, the mongrel, the mulatto, the half-breed, the half dead, in short, those who cross over, pass over, or go through the confines of “normal”. (3) [4]

Kneubuhl’s Samoan world consisted of extended networks of kin, belief in *aitu* (spirits or ghosts), and a sense of simmering anti-colonial resentment. On his maternal side he was related to Tupua Tamasese Lealofi-o-a'ana III, one of the leaders of Samoa’s pro-independence Mau movement. Tamasese had been exiled in 1924 and imprisoned in 1928 by the New Zealand administration in their bid to suppress anti-colonial dissent. Kneubuhl describes meeting Tamasese as “one of those instant hero worship things. It was at our house here in Fagotogo, he came and stayed with us, and my mother was very close to him, they were very very close” (Kneubuhl 5). In 1929 New Zealand police opened fire on a demonstration in Apia, killing Tamasese and seven others (Black Saturday). Even as a young boy Kneubuhl registered the enormity of the event. It reinforced his sense of identification with Samoa as is evident in his recollection:

A machine gun nest ... opened fire and he [Tamasese] was killed, a hundred and something bullets in his body. A Samoan boy jumped on him to try to shield his body and he got sixty or something. I remember these figures because immediately after there was a song composed about the death of Tamasese and in the song practically every bullet was named and the song went on forever recounting all hundred and eighty-four bullets in Tamasese’s body. So he became our first great martyr and that sort of confirmed in my own mind my own Samoan lesson, dedication to things Samoan. (Kneubuhl 6)

Kneubuhl’s connection with the American world of his childhood was no less powerful but it seemed considerably more fraught. It was

characterized by colonial occupation, most powerfully symbolized by the presence of the U.S. navy. Perhaps presciently, Kneubuhl's early memories of American naval presence were at the local cinema where he said "the left side were backless benches for Samoans ... and a few palagis like my father, the right side was the Navy side and that was all wicker chairs, and when the governor ... showed up ... somebody called attention and we all had to stand up" (Kneubuhl 38).

Although John Kneubuhl's father Benjamin may have "sided" with Samoans at the cinema, at home his children experienced him as a symbol of American imperialism. John recalls a dinner where

there was just my father, my mother, my sister Marge and myself, and I looked across the table and asked Marge in Samoan, if she would pass the gravy boat or something like that and my father exploded and screamed he wouldn't have this nigger talk at his table, and there's my mother sitting at the other end of the table, so the rest of dinner was finished in silence. (Kneubuhl 34)

John Kneubuhl acknowledges being stunned by his father's overt racism at the time but later came to understand that his apparent insensitivity and intolerance stemmed from deep-seated anxieties about his children's potentially precarious and uncertain futures as *'afakasi*. Benjamin Kneubuhl may have felt that ensuring his children's American cultural competencies such as English would mitigate against future discrimination. Around this time American Samoan "half-castes were considered to be Samoan unless they became involved in Papalagi affairs or aspired to become matai" (Salesa, "Troublesome Half-Castes" 169) in which case they were considered non-Samoan (Keesing 455 in Salesa, "Troublesome Half-Castes" 169). [5] The tendency to consider half-castes Samoan in most situations except for a few very specific contexts places Benjamin Kneubuhl's fears about his children's future welfare in a context where mixed race conferred few social advantages. Benjamin Kneubuhl was a self made man. He arrived in Samoa with virtually nothing and he became a successful merchant and shipping agent. He passed the California State Bar exam with an eighth grade education and a correspondence course but his initiative and wealth could not ensure his children's welfare. Salesa observes that half-castes in American Samoa often had their marginality turned against them by Samoans and American alike. "Only a few managed to do well out of the administration, finding jobs as interpreters, as the government printer,

and the chief of police” (Salesa, “Troublesome Half-Castes” 170).

Ironically, Benjamin Kneubuhl’s fears for his children’s future proved largely unfounded. His three sons’ cultural, academic, sporting and artistic capabilities ensured that they were accepted if not warmly embraced by the American establishment. John attended the elite Punahou School in Hawai’i where he was both a track champion and a rehearsal pianist with the Honolulu Symphony Orchestra. He enrolled at Yale hoping to study with composer Paul Hindemith but his audition was unsuccessful. Part of his audition piece, a libretto written to accompany his one act Samoan opera, however, was passed on to the admissions committee of Yale’s famous graduate “47 Workshop” for playwriting. They admitted him as an undergraduate and he worked with major playwrights such as Thornton Wilder, Elmer Rice and Maxwell Anderson. In his senior year, Kneubuhl staged a play set in Samoa titled *The Sunset Crowd*, which received positive reviews in the *Yale Daily News* (Holtzmann). Shortly thereafter he married his childhood sweetheart Dotsy Schenck, a fellow Punahou alum who was enrolled at Wellesley at the time. In the midst of a period in his life where he went from strength to strength, Kneubuhl came up sharply against American racism and the limits of his acceptance. Hoping to be married in Baltimore, Maryland, because Dotsy had relatives there, John Kneubuhl was unable to get a marriage license because of the state’s anti-miscegenation legislation. The couple subsequently married in New Haven Connecticut, but the contradiction between being celebrated at Yale for producing a sophisticated postcolonial theatrical vision of Samoa and the sexual legislative constraints imposed upon him by American racism underscores the brutal irreconcilability of Kneubuhl’s “two worlds.”

After graduation he was drafted and sent on a number of seemingly contrived surveillance missions including tracking Errol Flynn (Kneubuhl 106). Following the Japanese surrender, Kneubuhl spent time in Micronesia looking for remnant Japanese troops and establishing occupation forces. Upon discharge he received a prestigious writing fellowship in England but was forced to decline because of his father-in-law’s protracted terminal illness. Instead Kneubuhl served as Director of the Honolulu Community Theatre, the second oldest continuously run community theatre in America (Kneubuhl 110). [6] During his tenure there from 1946-1949 he chafed under its middle-brow tastes and non-professional actors, but he nevertheless managed to write and stage several landmark productions. These works were unprecedented because they depicted local stories in pidgin (Carroll and Carroll 58-60;

Sinavaiana-Gabbard 214-217). [7] By the end of 1949 Kneubuhl was critically celebrated but broke and left Honolulu for Los Angeles (Heim 5). It was not a decision he took lightly. He said, "I don't like movies, and I made a vow long before this that I would never go to Hollywood.... I was ... trying to look for work in a medium I didn't particularly like, and we're stuck, I had to find work because I had literally no money" (Kneubuhl 116). The first years in Los Angeles were very lean but by the mid 1950s Kneubuhl had become a highly sought after freelance writer. Never interested in initiating projects as a producer because of the financial risks involved and the constant negotiation network television required, Kneubuhl essentially became a writer for hire, specializing in reviving or saving failing series (Kneubuhl 118).

By the time Kneubuhl took the meeting with Freiberg and wrote Loveless' first episode "The Night The Wizard Shook the Earth" (reputedly in a single inspired night), Kneubuhl's ambivalence about working in Los Angeles had hardened into antipathy. He saw himself as a mere cog in the television machine. He described what he did as "typing" rather than "writing." He was professionally respected and financially well compensated for his work but he regarded it as creatively empty except the work he did for *The Wild Wild West*, where he felt he was among friends. He described his screenplays for the series as a "pocket of good fun" (Kneubuhl 119). It wasn't all just fun however, because his intricate, unconventional plots and Miguelito Loveless' absurd characterization offer compelling insights into the ambivalence underlying the popular appeal of westerns in the Pacific.

Both Salesa and Somerville, writing about Samoans and Māori respectively, note the contradictions posed by the popularity of the cinematic cowboy. Salesa writes:

In an easy and convenient world, Samoans might have recognized the shared predicament between themselves and filmic Indians, turned the tables on cowboys ... and staged inversions of the narratives of westerns.... But it is pretty clear that Samoans were not interested in playing Indian.... Samoans wanted to be cowboys. ("Cowboys in the House" 332)

Somerville draws attention to similar contradictions in Māori author Witi Ihimaera's short story "Nobody Wanted to Be Indians" (663-664, 673-677). [8] In this story, the second of four which address Hollywood's influence on Māori imaginaries, Ihimaera recounts two boys fighting over which

one would get to play the cowboy and who would be left to be the Indian. He writes: "When we came out of the theatre Willie Boy and I saw ourselves as white, aligning with our heroes and heroines of the Technicolor screen. Although we were really brown, we would beat up on each other just to play the hero. Neither of us wanted to be an Indian" (Ihimaera 222). By wanting to be cowboys, the Māori boys disrupted common sense notions of cinematic identification that pivot upon a recognition of superficial resemblance. They recognized that they were supposed to identify with Indians based upon their shared non-whiteness and their political subordination, but they refused because of the abject subjugation cinematic Indians signified (Somerville 666). In a sense they disidentified with cowboys (Munoz 11-13). They read themselves and their life narratives "in a moment, object, or subject that is not culturally coded to 'connect' with the disidentifying subject" (Munoz 12). The boys recognized, disavowed and strategically transformed the contradictions posed by the cinematic cowboy, reinvesting him with new life and relevance.

Might Samoans and Māori have responded differently if they have been offered the option of a powerful anti-colonial villain; someone who could stand up to the transcendent cowboy? In several respects, Miguelito Loveless fulfills this speculative fantasy while remaining an unlikely figure for identification. [9] In virtually all the episodes Kneubuhl wrote, the politically dispossessed Loveless actively seeks retribution against colonial oppression. As mentioned previously Loveless threatens to use weapons of mass destruction against innocents until his misappropriated inheritance has been restored in "The Night the Wizard Shook the Earth." In "The Night the Terror Stalked the Town" he surgically alters one of his minions called Janus, to look exactly like James West so that he will be able to infiltrate the United States mint and hold it hostage until the government repatriates Loveless' land. Unfortunately the plot fails because Loveless produces such an accurate doppelganger that he is unable to distinguish between the real and the fake West allowing the real West to escape and arrange for Loveless' arrest. This scenario provides an interesting and ironic counterpoint to Bhabha's conception of colonial mimicry as invariably partial and incomplete (129). In "The Night of the Green Terror" Loveless uses chemical weapons to manipulate ten thousand Indians into allying with him against the government, and in Kneubuhl's last Loveless episode "The Night of the Surreal McCoy," the villain seeks to infiltrate and sabotage imperial powers such as Britain by using a superior technology that insinuates hired assassins in American paintings donated under the guise of diplomacy. In addition to angry,

vindictive, and needy Loveless was also clever. He invented explosives that could move mountains, hallucinatory drugs that compelled men to kill their nearest and dearest, defoliants that stripped the flora and fauna from the landscape and a machine that enabled humans to dematerialize and rematerialize using sound waves. He was an accomplished painter, sculptor, surgeon and vocalist. James West may have been the show's handsome hero, but Loveless was by far the more charismatic and compelling figure. West always thwarted Loveless' plans but he was unable to ultimately destroy his nemesis. The dwarf was an enduring, haunting figure who always managed to fight another day.

No matter how extraordinarily talented, however, Loveless could never transcend his physical limitations. His dwarfism was a constant reminder of his inalienable difference, fuelling his sense of marginality. His desire for full stature and its attendant status was especially evident in two episodes. In "The Night of the Murderous Spring," an episode in which Loveless plans to distribute hallucinogens on the feet of migratory ducks, he gazes into a magical mirror that reflects his deepest desires. Loveless asks his handsome full statured reflection, "Is there anything you cannot do, or any world you cannot make to live in?" His reflection answers back "No, none. The world I wish for is the world I will have." This plot device is more than a little reminiscent of Lacan's mirror stage. Loveless desires a world in which he is the same as everyone else, but this is an impossible fantasy. He is doomed to register his lack and his desire. Even his fellow colonially oppressed regard him with disdain. For example in "The Night of the Green Terror," Loveless seeks to impress an Indian chief. Loveless inserts himself into a mechanized suit of armor thus allowing him to appear tall, powerful and deserving of respect. His attempt to appear as big as or bigger than the Indians and James West fails, however, when he trips and topples over during a crucial duel revealing himself to be exactly the "little man" the Indian chief contemptuously referred to just moments before.

Kneubuhl's dwarf symbolized the postcolonial subject's sense of marginality and incongruity. Loveless had extraordinary talent but the world he lived in never failed to register his difference first. It is tempting to read Kneubuhl's use of the dwarf as an idiosyncratic response to his own persistent sense of alienation, or perhaps as a representation that would resonate with audiences familiar with the mestizaje borderlands of the continental United States, but the dwarf is also a recurrent motif in Samoan literature and cinema.

Little people figure in Albert Wendt's fiction and Tusi Tamasese's feature length Samoan film, *The Orator/La Tulafale*. In "Pint Size Devil on a Thoroughbred" first published in 1974, Wendt writes about the colourful exploits of the half Chinese half Samoan Pili who is adopted by his Samoan aunt's family. Perhaps not technically a dwarf, Pili nevertheless barely reaches five feet. He derives his moniker, "the pint sized devil on a thoroughbred" from his brief interlude as a jockey that comes to an end when he precipitates an accident that leaves a horse dead and its rider permanently crippled. Pili becomes widely regarded as "a confidence man, a thief, a liar, a crook and a gangster" (Wendt, *The Best of* 53). He disdains conventional notions of heroism and respectability. Instead he follows his own code of ethics modeled loosely on the famous American outlaw Billy the Kid. Perversely, Pili believes that people are burdened by morality, property and propriety. His duty therefore, is to relieve them of these burdens or "problems." Pili "believed that murder, beating children, poisoning fish and animals, and people, abortion, encouraging people *not* to part with their problems (namely, their money, property, goods...) were wrong, sinful and against the law – his law" (Wendt, *The Best of* 153). Pili's outlaw code inverts socially accepted norms, equating social status and accumulation of wealth as inherently immoral. Ironically, the diminutive outlaw drowns while trying to rescue two police officers caught in a raging river. He dies saving those who enforce the very rules he holds in contempt, suggesting that Pili's commitment to being an outlaw is ambivalent and conflicted at best. Both Pili and Loveless are mixed race outlaws who mimic and mock the western's signature trope of transcendent masculinity, simultaneously undermining its colonial mastery and reinforcing its cultural power. They both desire acceptance and reconciliation between themselves and their social context but find their desires and their social realities irreconcilable.

In Wendt's *Leaves of the Banyan Tree* initially published in 1979, Tagata is a dwarf who befriends Pepe, the dissolute son of Tauilo pepe Mauga. Tagata and Pepe are best of friends and partners in crime both literally and figuratively. Tagata helps Pepe rob his father's store, and seduce the "innocent" Susana. They spend their days drinking and going to gangster films at the local cinema in "the Vaipe" an urban backwater of Apia, Samoa's largest town (Najita, 65). While Pepe progressively assumes responsibility for Tagata's parents' market business, Tagata struggles with his dwarfism, finally retreating into his room. Pepe sympathizes with Tagata's struggle describing it as akin to the flying fox (which happens to be Tagata's nickname). Pepe says that like the flying fox who may fly like

a bird but is otherwise very different, Tagata can find “no nest with the other birds because they laugh at him and treat him different because he is not what a bird should be. Now, he ... is trying to grow and be like other men, that is my understanding of his problem” (Wendt, *Leaves of the Banyan* 213). Unable to reconcile himself with his insurmountable difference, Tagata finally succumbs to depression and hangs himself from a mango tree. In his suicide note he writes:

I was born a small man with a big man inside, the flying fox with an eagle in the gut. All my life I tried for to free this eagle so he can fly high and dazzle the world. Anyway, on this my last day and hour, you will find the eagle flying on the mango tree with his one wing of rope.... The papalagi and his world has turned us and people like your rich but unhappy father and all the modern Samoans into cartoons of themselves, funny, crying ridiculous shadows on the picture screen. Nevermind, we tried to be true to ourselves” (Wendt, *Leaves of the Banyan* 226).

Tagata is not *'afakasi* but, like Loveless and Pili, he symbolizes the struggle to navigate the complex competing physiognomic and psychological tensions that characterize borderlands in the Pacific. In the case of *Flying Fox in a Freedom Tree* the borderland is Apia, long understood as a zone of competing imperial interests where hybridity is not necessarily synthetic, easy, cosmopolitan or privileged (Salesa, “Samoa’s Half-Castes” 74).

Finally, the dwarf Sa’ili in Tusi Tamasese’s 2011 film *The Orator* is both familiar and quite distinct. Sa’ili lives on the social margins of his village because he is a little person and lacks a chiefly title. He has also married Va’aiga, a woman exiled from another village for bearing a daughter out of wedlock. Sa’ili has taken on the added responsibility of raising her daughter Litia but the child is far from grateful. Tamasese’s film has all of Loveless’ pathos and desire but none of his comic absurdity.

Miguelito Loveless bears familial resemblance to Pili, Tagata and Sa’ili. Pili and Tagata are simultaneously picaresque and pitiable tragicomic figures. Both live their lives according their own outlaw code, maintaining critical distance from the hypocrisy and duplicity they see as characteristic of modernizing Samoa. Sa’ili on the other hand quietly struggles under the challenge of being who he is where he is. Whether or not Kneubuhl and Wendt’s dwarves originate precisely from the same source is uncertain. Their similarities and the recurrent motif of the western however, are uncanny and highly suggestive. Kneubuhl was

familiar with Wendt's work. He recognized him as a fellow 'afakasi, sent as a child envoy to navigate the post and neocolonial Pacific, although Wendt was sent to New Zealand rather than the United States. Tamasese on the other hand was apparently unaware that *Flying Fox in a Freedom Tree* featured a dwarf until after he had written his screenplay (Kihleng and Teaiwa 437). One dwarf is unremarkable, two dwarves constitute a coincidence and three dwarves in Samoan motion picture and literature suggest a trend worth taking note of. The repetition of the dwarf motif carries particular symbolic weight in Samoan narratives about marginality.

Conclusion

For most of *The Wild Wild West*'s audience Miguelito Loveless was nothing more than a primetime curiosity. Taken at face value, he was an unorthodox villain in a genre-bending show attempting to reinvent the western at the end of the sixties. However, he could and perhaps should be seen as far more than that. As a half-Mexican dwarf with an anti-colonial axe to grind and a fiendish intellect, he is as counterintuitive a figure in Pacific film and television scholarship as the Hollywood cowboy. However, Loveless offers insight into how Pacific politics, motifs and sensibilities were at work at the heart of America's global television empire. He also illustrates how Hollywood cowboys and westerns became part of twentieth century Samoan cultural repertoires. *The Wild Wild West* producer Freiburger noted that one of the only spaces on network television for liberal multicultural politics in the sixties was in outer space or in the western (Reid).

Dissatisfied with limited opportunities to express postcolonial politics on American television, John Kneubuhl abruptly quit and returned to American Samoa in 1968. Six months after leaving Los Angeles, he collected up twenty years of scripts (all of them produced) and set them alight in his backyard. It was a gesture he described as liberating. Afterward he was finally able get on with what he felt was more meaningful and fulfilling work. Kneubuhl's sense that the taint of Hollywood and commercialism corrupted his work is perhaps justified, but this reappraisal of his writing in *The Wild Wild West* reminds us that postcolonial critique in the Pacific is slippery, polymorphous, and sometimes comes from the unlikeliest places.

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Endnotes

1. Garrison's pitch was no doubt inspired by his own earlier failed attempt to produce Ian Fleming's *Casino Royale* (Kesler 7-8)
2. *Palagi* refers to a person of European or non-Samoan descent
3. John Kneubuhl's mother was herself a descendant of an 'afakasi family. Her forebear was the missionary George Pritchard (1796-1883).
4. *Los atravesados* translates into "the crossed." Rivera (187) emphasizes the interstitial nature of those who live in and are produced by borderlands. She describes them as "those who do not fit the dominant categories; those whose presence shocks. Not from here; not from there."
5. *Matai* refers to a Samoan chief. Half-caste intervention in the matai system of chiefly governance was considered undesirable (Keesing 455).
6. The Honolulu Community Theatre started in 1915 as the Footlights Club. In 1990 it became the Diamond Head Theatre.
7. Pidgin refers to Hawaiian Creole English (HCE). It is a vernacular that developed on multi-ethnic plantations. Although standardized English is the official language of government and education in Hawaii, pidgin persists among local communities (Sato 266)
8. Somerville's work focuses on why the Māori boys distance themselves from filmic Indians rather than the boys' desire to be cowboys (674-677).
9. In his oral history Kneubuhl recounts a very early fascination with being an "outlaw." He talks about organizing a gang of little boys who planned to kidnap the Governor's son and give the Governor an

ultimatum. The boys planned to tell him “You could get your kid back alive if you’ll leave our island and go away” (Kneubuhl 7). The boys failed in their plot because they felt they needed to dress up in a full cowboy’s outfit in order to carry out the plan properly. “Butler Brothers (sic) catalog advertised full cowboy uniform complete with lariat and chaps for three dollars and twenty-five cents and there was twelve of us in the group that was going to kidnap the Governor’s son and we couldn’t all come up with three dollars and twenty-five cents ... without a uniform, what the hell’s the use of have a political movement?” (Kneubuhl 7).

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