



Cookie in the Cook Islands,
by Michel Tuffery. 2008.
Acrylic on canvas, 500 x 760 mm.
Collection of the British Museum.

Cowboys in the House of Polynesia

Damon Salesa

Me, Adam,
Son of Noble Savage
Of the House of Polynesia
(ALBERT WENDT, “ME, ADAM”)

Model your life, your ev’rything
on our brave Pili the Kid.
(ALBERT WENDT, “THE BALLAD OF PILI THE KID”)

In March 1914, four fitafita (“native” police) from Tuamasaga stole some money from indentured Chinese laborers. Afraid they would be heavily punished, they then broke into the colonial jail and took arms and ammunition. The German colonial rulers of Sāmoa had just gone through a difficult six years, and had fancied that Samoan unrest was behind them. Lauaki Namulau‘ulu Mamoe’s Mau a Pule had been routed and dissembled; he and other leaders had been exiled. But this action of four supposedly colonial operatives seemed to send shivers through the colonial community in Apia. Local settlers as well as a number of Samoans began to form posses. Leading the chase was Herr von Egidy, and soon the rogue fitafita were holed up and surrounded. A shootout began and lasted from mid-morning till mid-afternoon (Westbrook nd; Schultz-Ewerth 1926, 138).

It was no accident that this seemed almost a scene from a western, the climax of a cowboy movie—because in a sense it was. In the course of the shootout it became clear from the words and actions of the four fitafita that they did not see themselves as common criminals or mere renegades; rather, as observers put it, their actions and understandings had been shaped by “the cowboy pictures shown in our town hall,” which “had some influence on the boys’ minds” (Westbrook nd). Such was the effect of the “echt amerikanischen Cowboy-Filmen” (true American cowboy

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film): It had enthused them to “act out once again in reality scenes they had liked so much on the screen”; they had even robbed in the cowboy style, complete with commands of “hände hoch!” (“hands up!”) (Schultze-Ewerth 1926, 138). Throughout the long shootout, the “cowboys” continued to call out, warning Samoans to stay away, professing that they wanted only to kill papālagi (foreigners/white people), not Samoans.

It proved a deadly day. The four fitafita shot and killed two German colonists, and in the course of the gunfight, a further two German members of the posse were also shot. The rogues engendered a panic, chiefly among resident papālagi. Samoans died too, but only among the four; by day’s end, three of the renegade fitafita had been killed by gunfire. The one remaining, Ao, was injured but still defiant. He was taken to trial where he supposedly declared that he had no remorse, and that, had he a gun, he would happily shoot the judge. The killing, and the dying, was not done. Ao was convicted, and was hung in a botched execution by an inexperienced executioner; he died not by broken neck but by strangling.

This was an awful end to Sāmoa’s most violent cowboy day. But it was not the end of the cowboy in Sāmoa. Cowboys and the films they inhabited were to prove the most popular and defining icons of twentieth-century Sāmoa (Wendt 1986, 15; 2004, 16). Generations of Samoans from at least the 1910s to the 1970s preferred westerns above all other kinds of film. At various times westerns virtually monopolized Apia’s screens, playing end to end at the famous Tivoli, and later, Tivoli 2 theaters, and also traveling around villages. No young Samoan, and certainly no Samoan boy, had not seen westerns, and did not have their own understandings of their vocabulary of visuals, characters, and plots. Albert Wendt was no different; he grew up watching westerns (Wendt 1984, 47), and later watched as others watched—a shaping that was not simply peripheral, but in some key ways, central. Cowboys loom large in many of Albert’s works, and this is neither accidental nor unimportant. Albert’s writings recognize fuller dimensions of Samoan life: worlds that encompass cowboys, aitu, rugby, dynamite fishing, and love, as well as churches, matai, fono, Tūmua, and Pule.¹

Samoan histories of the cowboy, and histories of Samoan cowboys, still have their own special place, and Albert Wendt is their historian. Almost all of Albert’s books have a place—some momentarily, some centrally—for the figure of the cowboy, whether the cowboy in Sāmoa or the Samoan cowboy. Perhaps the most revealing is one that happens in *Leaves of the Banyan Tree*. Tauilopepe dreams nightmarishly of the village challenging and ridiculing him in the church. But the challenge takes forms that con-

found him. Toasa farts in the pulpit, and Tauilo pepe's son Pepe leads a large "rabble" of the villagers. Tauilo pepe seems to be on trial, and does not know why. He is obviously afraid of many kinds of challenges and different questions. But when the big question finally comes, Tauilo pepe is taken by surprise. His son Pepe asks, simply, "Do you believe in cowboys?" Pepe recasts the life of the village in the terms of the western. "Now, father, who are you," he asks, "a cowboy or a villain?" (Wendt 1979, 371–372). It is not wrong to see this as among the most important, epic questions in Albert's work. Cowboys are the challengers not just to colonial rule, but to the rule of Tauilo pepe, and to the limits of imagination and place.

In an easy, convenient world, Samoans might have recognized a shared colonial predicament between themselves and filmic Indians, turned the tables on cowboys and Germans, and staged inversions of the narratives of westerns. Samoans might have whooped it up as renegade Indians. But it is pretty clear that Samoans were not interested in "playing Indian," even though white Americans certainly were (Deloria 1998). Samoans wanted to be cowboys. And in some ways, it might be argued that this was perhaps a greater inversion—that in doing so Samoans made Germans and papālagi into Indians. Cowboys, with their ready violence and masculinity, their music, their sense of romance and cosmic justice, were recognized by Samoans as transcendent figures. These ironies multiply when we consider that metropolitan Germans, too, had their strange connections with the westerns, cowboys, and especially the Indians of the American West (see, eg, May 1998), and that the Pacific, including Sāmoa, was often explicitly included in American conceptions of the West (Wister 1895; Drinnon 1980).

Pepe's invocation of cowboys, as with others in Albert's work, calls beyond, to the deeper, mythic qualities of cowboys and westerns. In his interrogation of Tauilo pepe, Pepe makes a statement that ponders, in effect, the ontology of cowboys: "You know," he reminds his father, cowboys are those who "play guitars and shoot bad fellows" (Wendt 1979, 371). The mythic resonances of the western are well known. Herman Melville foreshadowed them when he wrote of the "metaphysics of Indian hating" (1971, 323), and Richard Slotkin has shown how the myths of the West and the frontier lie at the very heart of US nationalism, framing a violent vision of a "gunfighter nation" (1992; see also Drinnon 1980). Albert's call recognizes broader Samoan engagements with cowboys. The masculine ontology of cowboys signaled how westerns encapsulated mythic, archetypal qualities that had leverage and resonance when appropriated

into Samoan contexts, and into the ways that Samoans understood both themselves and their worlds.

These mythic qualities were apparent in the multiple global lives of the western or cowboy film. Samoans claimed the western as a pivotal film genre, and made it something more—a fulcrum for certain local cultural formations. Sāmoa was not alone in making westerns central in this way: not only in other places in the Pacific, but also, very importantly, in many places in Africa, the cowboy film was one of the most appealing and appropriable of foreign narratives or things. In the Copperbelt in Northern Rhodesia, Dar es Salaam, Ghana, South Africa, as in the streets of Apia, and Hawera in New Zealand, the cowboy was at once a faraway and a local figure of special resonance. Cowboys were ripped from the movie screen into the ordinary dimensions of colonized lives. As in 1914 in Sāmoa, so elsewhere at other times, this was no laughing matter, but one that inserted an element of danger into the circulation of what others have seen as a distinctive cultural form of US nationalism and capitalism. Officials in many empires feared the power that cinema might have, and the penchant for young men to emulate cowboys was both easily imagined by colonial rulers and feared by them. If on the one hand these self-made cowboys played guitars and pursued baddies, on the other, colonial rulers, censors, and institutions proved to be willing and able to shape up to the role of being villains.

Cowboys in the Congo were subjects of some beautiful, haunting images taken by the Congolese photographer, Depara, in the 1950s. These images help open up readings of Congolese and other African and empire cowboys as serious, self-fashioned subjects—Kinshasa cowboys on bicycle horses, in gangs of “Yankees” and “Bills” (De Boeck 2004).² This is important because it is clear that it has become too easy to read them in opposite ways, as caricatures, naive, or simple. Few better examples exist than in Ronald Hugh Morrieson’s canonical New Zealand novel, *Came a Hot Friday* (1964). One of the main characters, and perhaps the most distinctive in New Zealand fiction, is the Te Whakinga Kid, a Taranaki Māori who chooses to inhabit the persona of a Mexican cowboy/bandito, and who desires to be an outlaw and yet feels compelled to wear a lawman’s star on his chest—because he has one, and it is beautiful. The Te Whakinga Kid has proven confounding for readers, film directors, and literary critics alike. In the film production of *Came a Hot Friday* (Mune 1985), the Te Whakinga Kid became the Tainui Kid, and was depicted in the body of Billy T James—New Zealand’s best-known comedian—as a buf-

foon. But other readings seem more apt: for one, the Kid fashions himself as renegade, potentially dangerous, spatially transcendent, even mythical, and certainly self-mythologizing. This is in line with the figurings of other empire cowboys—not least those in Albert’s work, as can be seen in the ballad he composed for one of these dangerous Samoan cowboys, “Pili the Kid” (Wendt 1974, 60–61).

Empire cowboys were hardly figures of fun, but were rather young men claiming a dangerous, renegade masculinity. At a time when colonial and mission schools in most imperial fields were trying to impose and regulate intimate bodily disciplines and to govern bodies as sources of labor and subjects of law, cowboys were not easily subjected, and were built on a resistance to such order and discipline, and particularly, colonial law. If in some ways the imperial cowboy might be thought of as a kind of bricoleur (see Lévi-Strauss 1966), this was enacted in subversive ways. As Charles Ambler noted, of North Rhodesian cowboys in particular, “African audiences seem to have appropriated elements of westerns and other action movies in ways that subverted the narrative and racially defined principles of censorship.” In westerns, these empire cowboys found at the very least a “crucial repertoire of images through which to engage notions of modernity”—and, in most instances, much more besides (Ambler 2001, 86–87).

One of the quintessential westerns is George Steven’s 1953 film, *Shane*. It begins with a lone gunslinger, Shane, riding into the story, and ends with Shane, having changed the lives of locals, riding off toward the horizon. One of the most interesting dimensions of *Shane*, though, is that it is not just a western but also a history, drawn from and offering a powerful interpretation of what became known as the Johnson County War. This is the same history that is taken up by the later film *Heaven’s Gate* (Cimino 1980), which has an almost opposite reputation as one of the great film failures. David Cohen has drawn out a comparison between the two, finding *Heaven’s Gate*’s vision more interesting and complex. But *Shane* mobilized the “essential structures” of the Johnson County War, and was, as Cohen puts it, “a mythic text” (Cohen 1994, 211–215). By the time Shane leaves, each of the main family members—husband, wife, and son—has a palpable affection, even love, for Shane. Little Joe chases after Shane as he rides off, and shows by his actions and words that he understands that he needs both to mourn and farewell him. “Shane! Come back!” Little Joe calls, followed quickly by his farewell: “Bye, Shane.” As much as Samoan and other imperial cowboys were local figures, enmeshed in ways they could not control, they were inspired by the kind of mythic dimensions

and the kind of mythic endings that Shane epitomized. These are also the drives that lie behind and within Albert's cowboys, as well as the renegade fitafita, however unsuccessfully they pursued them.

Paul Sharrad, in a thoughtful consideration of Albert's work with and in history, supposed that Wendt's interventions could be seen in terms of Michel de Certeau's works (Sharrad 2002). This seems a wise observation, as de Certeau has carefully detailed the ways in which ordinary people constitute their spaces through practice and disturb the formations of power through simple acts, whether walking or remembering (1984). But, as powerful as de Certeau's analyses are, it seems to me they are devoid of the kind of personal, political, and mythological power that are the central features of both traditional accounts of the Samoan past and politics, and the mythic features of cowboy films and empire cowboys. What would Sāmoa be without Pili the Kid and its other cowboys?

Samoan cowboys were not just characters in Samoan fictions, as the four Samoan cowboys of March 1914 make clear. Yet their absence from what we remember of Sāmoa's past is suggestive. Why are these brutal cowboy events, on one of the most violently fatal days in Sāmoa's past, not present in Sāmoa's written or remembered histories? In some sense this is surprising. Cowboys, I have argued, had a special resonance and mobility for Samoans, as for others. As my own fumbblings in this direction have confirmed, one of the surest ways to get Samoans of a certain vintage—especially Samoan men—to talk about the past is to ask them about cowboys. But a critical dimension to this event, particularly the renegade fitafita's construction of it, was that it was not aligned with larger political formations. It stemmed not from the choreography of ali'i (chiefs) or Tūmua and Pule; it did not arise from colonial machinations. As an event, it was, in a sense, a renegade history. Difficult to align within the order of the time, it has subsequently been unused for national histories, and unneeded for anticolonial ones. It was, in these dimensions, a work of cowboy justice in a time and place that could make no sense of cowboys, even if some could make sense of themselves *through* cowboys.

Singing, fighting, playing guitar: this was the work of a cowboy, and it could be done, or so it seemed to some, as much in Sāmoa (or Kinshasa) as in Wyoming. But as powerful as they were, the cowboys' code was not for all times and places, and by the 1970s it was undergoing its own decline. As the genre of the western declined in Hollywood, its successor genre (at least in Sāmoa) was the Kung Fu movie, and that was booming. The Man With No Name and Hopalong Cassidy gave way not to Indians,

or lawmen, but to Bruce Lee and Jackie Chan. Cowboys became Shaolin warriors, and since have become homeboys. Yet the specificities were not defining; Samoan cowboys, pirates and gangsters alike, both future and past, still hold a special affinity for Albert. This is marked in Albert's poem "The Contest," in which a young Samoan finds in the funk of nascent hip hop the rhythms to win in an ancient oratorical contest (see Henderson, this issue). Published as a poem in 1986, it was transformed into a play a decade later (Wendt 1986; Simei-Barton 1996). It might be asked, after Greg Dening: in a world filled with officials and ali'i, spirits and flying foxes, ninjas and cowboys, and now, hip hoppers, who can write the history of them all?

Albert engaged history through an array of unconventional subjects, many of whom are elided or excluded from other accounts of both the past and present. The principals of his narratives—not least cowboys, but dwarves, ne'er-do-wells, town dwellers, those on the fringes of Samoan and New Zealand life—were people considered by others not to be "proper" subjects of history. Even as others began projects to reconstitute the past of the Pacific, largely through cultural and national frames, Albert was reconstituting his subject in a different way. Characteristically, Albert's work expressed an engagement with silence, absence, or invisibility that was evident in his beginnings as an historian. To begin with the study of Samoan history in the 1960s was to be confronted with a cacophony of very similar, papālagi voices, all of them talking across profound and deep silences. Michel-Rolph Trouillot has shown how silences of different kinds proliferate in history. "Silences enter the process of historical production at four crucial moments," he wrote, "the moment of fact creation (the making of sources); the moment of fact assembly (the making of archives); the moment of fact retrieval (the making of narratives); and the moment of retrospective significance (the making of history in the final instance)" (Trouillot 1995, 26). Albert's can be put into relief through these various silences, beginning with the problems of history and the making of narrative, but through them embarking on the deeper and abiding problems in the making of sources and archives, where much of the paucity of colonial histories originates.

The necessity to honor and mark certain kinds of silence jibes with the call, observed by many of Albert's characters, that there are times when things are best done the cowboy way. It was appropriate, then, that there was something a little cowboy about Albert's first and only foray into "straight" academic history. This was "Guardians and Wards," Albert's

1965 master's thesis in history on the Mau, the nonviolent movement for Samoan independence from colonial rule. At the time that Albert was writing (1962), Sāmoa had barely ceased being a New Zealand colony. The key works of record were those that came out of the events themselves, a few memoirs, the publications spurred by the Mau controversy, and particularly the anthropological monograph by Felix Keesing (1934). The historiography was even thinner. The only academic works on Samoan history were, almost exclusively, those that focused on foreign relations concerning Sāmoa. The pivotal "island-centered" works of Richard Gilson and James W Davidson were not published until 1967 and 1970, respectively. As a result, there were few synthetic accounts of Sāmoa's twentieth-century history, a predicament that is difficult to imagine after the boom in academic history since the 1960s.

Albert's was not the first thesis to try and historicize the Mau (Lowe 1943; Gifford 1964), though Albert's was far more seminal than other efforts, and remains strikingly "contemporary." At the time he was writing, it was no easy task to write such a history sincerely, and with intellectual honesty, yet still deal with the delicate issues that concerned the Mau and its silences (Wendt 1965). For one thing, the centrality of the Mau for the preceding three decades of Samoan history, and in the move to independence, was not yet stabilized or canonized, as it subsequently has become. The standard account, evident in the later work of his adviser, Mary Boyd, as well as in those of New Zealand officials, was that independence had come substantially due to the "winds of change" after the Second World War, and New Zealand's willingness to decolonize (Salesa 2009). This rendered the almost complete incapacitation of colonial government by Samoan activity and inactivity, and concessions that colonial government had been pressured into, as mere blips in the colonial narrative. Moreover, contemporary colonial officials and later historians did not have the sense that Albert had of the very deep divisions within Sāmoa that marked the period of the Mau. These sensitivities were still present, as many of the participants in the Mau were still alive, and the independence settlement had calmed but not erased conflicts. Moreover, Albert was still a young man, entering a domain of history that in Sāmoa had been reserved for the powerful and the elite. Intentionally or otherwise, he had found himself in a very challenging position.

These particularities were further complicated by Albert's desire to foreground the interpretive work of historians, the production of historical knowledge, and the partiality of historical archives. This ran very much

against the grain of the historical discipline more broadly, and especially against the New Zealand academy as it was in 1965, which in many ways was still working to establish itself—both as a series of newly established universities (rather than colleges) and as a significant part in the wider universes of the discipline. It was not that a reflective or philosophical dimension was uncommon among historians. Historians had long pontificated in such ways, though more typically at the end of careers, and in ways very different from the kind of political and institutional critiques that Albert was inclined to, which would only be normalized decades later. Albert's excursions in these directions alone would have made his work unconventional, and probably made his examiners uneasy. But "Guardians and Wards" was even more unconventional.

Victoria University of Wellington was itself beginning to reorient itself to the Pacific, in ways that would bear lasting fruit. But the substance of these changes was scarcely evident in Albert's time. There was not, for instance, a single course available on Pacific history at Victoria (or anywhere else in New Zealand) until the early 1970s (Boyd 1996). The work of Mary Boyd, his adviser, who was for many years the most influential voice on the topic of the Mau, had not yet been published (Boyd 1969a, 1969b, 1990). But the different trajectories that brought Albert and Boyd to the Mau meant that there were likely to be some fundamental incompatibilities between them. Where Albert's awareness of the Mau was nurtured from a boyhood in its shadows, Boyd's interests had grown, much like those of most of New Zealand's serious students of the Pacific, through public and state engagement. Boyd had, for a time, been part of the "Centennial Branch," which was publishing volumes to celebrate one hundred years since New Zealand's founding; she had also been involved with the founding of the New Zealand Institute of International Affairs. Such close relations between the study of history and the practices and institutions of public life were standard in Victoria University's History Department, and had been pioneered by Fred Wood and John Beaglehole. (Boyd would soon inherit Beaglehole's office, complete with his tapa hanging on the wall [Beaglehole 2006, 470].) Though Boyd saw some unsavory facets of New Zealand colonialism in Sāmoa very clearly, she retained a much more upbeat evaluation of New Zealand colonialism than has been maintained by most Samoan historians, including Albert and myself.

It is hard not to read in "Guardian and Wards" a larger history, both in the sense of all that changed in Albert while he wrote it, and the longer history of the Mau on which he seemed to embark. But ultimately that

history was truncated. (As it stands, the thesis claims only to address the first two years of the Mau, but it goes considerably further.) Reading it again, I find that Albert's disillusionment is palpable. Indeed, by its conclusion the thesis can be read as a full-throated act of some academic form of civil disobedience—a cowboy move. Up until the last section the thesis is already full of flourish, yet could still be hustled within the larger tent of 1960s Victoria University History Department. Yet at this juncture Albert adopted a different kind of narrative voice, one that was not (and is not) customary in historical writing. Not only is it couched in language that was rare among historians, but it is also bifurcated into a dialogue between two historians.

Yes, I see your point but . . . But what? Look, friend, I'm getting tired of your conscience. If I tell you I am your conscience, will you do what I'm telling you to do? No! Damn it, fellow, I AM YOUR CONSCIENCE! And I'm telling you, you're an honest man. If you question my judgment, you question your conscience, your own integrity and honesty. (Wendt 1965, 112)

Even today, when the strictures of thesis writing are considerably loosened, the tone and form are striking. Though these portions are only a small part of the thesis, and to my eyes not the most remarkable part, they perhaps most clearly portend what was to become of Albert. There he went, history-style, Vaipe-style—his style.

Albert was writing his history just as the study of Pacific history was entering its most productive and ambitious phase. That was happening in Canberra, at the Australian National University, under the leadership of James Davidson, but a significant cohort of Victoria history master's students, near contemporaries of Albert's, would go on to complete PhDs at Canberra. Establishing the Research School of Asian and Pacific Studies, Davidson had a very specific vision of Pacific history, one that was clearly articulated, appeared to be visionary, and included many dimensions beyond the usually defined limits of the academy. The "Problems of Pacific History," as Davidson put it, could no longer solely orbit European formations of religion, trade, and empire. These central features of established historiography had to take their place alongside "analyses of the indigenous forces that have similarly contributed to the making of the contemporary Pacific" (Davidson 1966, 21). This was Davidson's call to reorient history in the Pacific to better account for Islands and Islanders, a call that was met with localized, but great, enthusiasm. As Doug Munro and Brij V Lal put it, Canberra became Pacific history's "intellectual

Mecca.” The historians who trained there left, “armed with a doctorate and an island-oriented theology, branched out to preach their new gospel in different parts of the world. They were the new missionaries . . . in the vanguard of a different order of things” (Munro and Lal 2006, 2).

Albert was not a participant in these Canberra developments, and his institutional positions at Samoa College and the University of South Pacific paralleled his intellectual position in relation to them, which remained remote. Nonetheless, his work both was significant in their enterprises and allowed a critical assessment of several of their dimensions. One critical intersection between Pacific history and Albert was his appearance in a Kerry Howe article, “The Fate of the Savage in Pacific Historiography,” which marked a watershed intervention in Pacific history (Howe 1977). Howe ended his critique of the main course of Pacific historiography by turning to an Albert Wendt poem, “Me, Adam” (1973). This poem was consistent with the larger point Howe was making, but there were also other reasons to turn in this direction. For one thing, by the 1970s Albert was the most prominent and influential of Pacific Islands intellectuals (Howe 1977, 154). Perhaps not less important was the continuing paucity of Pacific Islanders in the field of Pacific history; by the year 2000, only one Canberra-trained Pacific Islander had gone on to work as an academic historian (Campbell 2003). In order to find an alternative to a historiography that Howe himself feared was becoming myopic, he turned to Albert, who wrote of the past in ways that Pacific historians customarily had not.

The particularities and power of Albert’s ways of narrating and critiquing the past were not simply due to their being fiction. History and literature, as has been remarked on ad nauseum since Hayden White (see, eg, White 1973), are very closely related, even interpellated. The desire “to novel” was a common aspiration among historians generally and Pacific historians more specifically. The very successful novelist Peter Corris began as a Pacific historian, and more recently Donald Denoon, former occupant of the Davidson Chair, has entered a second life as a novelist. Corris’s books are about Cliff Hardy and constitute the quintessential Australian crime fiction; Denoon’s first book, *Afterlife*, is set in the ether (2004). Albert’s work, on the other hand, is more grounded than most Pacific histories, and not only thoroughly Pacific, but also “on the edge,” as Vince Diaz and J Kēhaulani Kauanui might put it (2001). Albert’s move to fiction was less about freeing himself of the strictures of the place or its people than about exploring new tactics and possibilities: getting people where they were “at.” The creative fictions of Albert (and of other Pacific

intellectuals and novelists such as John Puihiatau Pule, Teresia Teaiwa, Sia Figiel, and Epeli Hau'ofa) are politically and culturally supercharged. Such political determinations are also at work in the related works of “faction” by Pacific historian Brij V Lal (see, eg, Lal 2008). On these trajectories the novel offers not merely freedom or license but also a new modality of address and possibility.

At any rate, the degree of scrutiny and criticism to which many Samoans have subjected Albert's novels would have humbled many historians. Any supposition that Albert was *just* writing fiction was evidently not widely shared by the many Samoans and academics who responded to his work. Albert's works were not just about Sāmoa, they *were* Samoan, implicated with Sāmoa, a part of Sāmoa's ongoing history and Albert's own visceral histories. As a result, Albert's works were consumed and circulated in ways very different from other novels about Sāmoa or the Pacific, both within Sāmoa and beyond. For non-Samoans—or perhaps more properly, those who were “outside” the Pacific—Albert was hailed and hauled into a different position, charged with a freight of authenticity and singularity. He was integrated into certain conversations that were not of his choosing. Among Samoans his reception was more intimate, even if it was occasionally harsh, as many Samoans were challenged by his depictions of Sāmoa and considered his access to the published page and public spheres ill used (Va'ai 1997, 7–8; Sharrad 2003, 243). His position at the edge appeared to hold in his transformation from historian to writer of fiction.

Albert was transfiguring Samoan genres and narratives into new kinds of writing, as Sina Va'ai has eloquently discussed (1997), but he was also doing more: Albert was reimagining, and creating, the figure of the Samoan and Oceanian writer. Perhaps Albert was the first to do this, or perhaps not, for although he published the first novel written by a Samoan, there was a genealogy of writers working in a Samoan literate tradition that went back nearly a century and a half. Regardless, Albert emerged as a writer in a powerful and impressive way; though certain conjunctures in the political and literary contexts of his time were necessary, they were not sufficient, and Albert's success was far from predictable. The work of Albert was the requisite ingredient. Still, Albert was his own conjuncture, formed through diverse genealogies that secured not only Camus and Borges but also Mele Tuaopepe and his Samoan lineages as literary forebears. After Albert's novels, and after Albert, there was, in Sāmoa and in Oceania, something that had not been there before: a subject position, and subjectivity of “writer” that could be inhabited and aspired to, had been

made possible for Samoans and other Pacific Islanders. It was a position in which one could at once be part of the larger archipelago of writers yet still preserve the intellectual and political sovereignty of the Pacific writer, who would (should) be of her or his islands, and be articulated with them through the stories, bone, blood, and sea.

And, of course, through the word—which had histories as much Pacific as foreign. This was typified in Sāmoa, where the technologies of writing and reading underwent an awesomely rapid spread from the 1830s through the 1850s. From that point, and since, there have been multiple and contradictory Samoan traditions of writing and reading. Yet in the century after the codification of written Samoan, the published literature available was remarkably narrow, limited to either the Bible, or parts of it, or to material directly connected to the missionary or Christian enterprises (Murray 1888). The entanglement between literacy and the Christian God and gospel remained intimate, and the few small nineteenth-century efforts to publish material that was not religious were unsuccessful. Indeed, as elsewhere in other imperial and mission fields, the nearest thing to fiction missionaries would contemplate translating and publishing was *The Pilgrim's Progress*, perhaps the most widely translated work in the world after the Bible (Hofmeyr 2004). Aside from the publications of the various colonial states, there was very little published Samoan available that was not explicitly religious until after the Second World War. The Word haunted the word on the Samoan written page.

But they were not alone, for even as Sāmoa (in the telling, with a rapidity unequalled in history) transitioned to become a nation “founded on God,” specters of the world before lingered. In the new era of Mālamalama (Christianity and Enlightenment), the old world, Pōuliuli, with its Samoan spirits and practices, was not replaced or displaced but rather made less visible, even invisible. But “Old” Sāmoa did not simply evacuate the new—as Albert has helped us better understand through his work. Nor was the old so easily pushed out of ordinary life in favor of the modern. Pōuliuli and Mālamalama may have been in some sense successive, but they remained also as contemporaries. Samoan ghosts, spirits, beliefs, and associated practices seemed not to be central in the new Christian practices and beliefs, but continued to haunt the new Samoan world of Christianity and enlightenment. Pōuliuli resided in the bush, in the night, in other places where it was appropriate, but as Samoans still commonly and powerfully recall, it remained visceral and near: ia pōuliuli lou tino, ae mālamalama ou mata.³

Pōuliuli and other Samoan pasts haunt Sāmoa still. Practices and beliefs that turned on the spirits and gods of Pōuliuli continued (and continue) to be practiced, especially in farming and fishing, activities redolent of generations of practice. Particular places, such as the Fafā, Pulemelei, and the Fale o le Fe'e, continue to be set aside and honored. Others permeate Samoan lives and understandings, whether in the practices of fofō and foma'i, or in the rituals and ceremonies of matai and fonofono. In most 'ava ceremonies, Samoan spirits quietly continue to get their share of the 'ava, even as O le Atua, God, gets the first prayer.⁴ The claim that tattooing continues to make on Samoan bodies and souls, as texts saturated in history and mingled in blood, works in similar ways (Wendt 1999). About these things there are different kinds of silence, of the varying sorts Michel-Rolph Trouillot helps us perceive (1995). To such a list of subjects we should add Albert's cowboys and fake madmen, as well as his own silences. Some of these will always be invisible or absent, others simply ineffable. Others still will play out at the edges of our senses, haunting like the pe'a (flying fox), moving through a village in twilight, not quite visible but still known by the sound of its wings and its smell.

Like morticians, historians work with the dead in the present, for the sake of the living. Albert allows us to see that these are not the only ways to engage the past. In his most resonant phrase on these matters, Albert observed that "we are what we remember"; narrow, fawning, cosmetic, memories have their own profound and immediate costs (Wendt 1987). This was not just a trenchant observation, but a call, for it clarified that remembering was not a kind of recreation, but a site of radical struggle. The project he seemed to call for, and embody, was one that has since been recognized and shared by others, notably Tuiatua Tupua Tamasese: to restore the fullness and possibilities of the past, and to "explore without apology" (Suaalii-Sauni and others 2008, 215–228). The tasks are not simply to renovate histories so that they can be more convenient or palatable, or to supplicate through new histories to new postcolonial masters, but to reconstitute relations with the past. The challenge Albert adds, for those of us of Oceania, is to live with the dead. We are what we remember, he has instructed us, and the dead are inside us, "woven into [our] flesh like the music of bone flutes" (Wendt 1976, 7). And yet there must be room for difference, for renegades, for cowboys—whether Pili the Kid, or just Pili, our ancestor.

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Notes

1 Aitu (spirits); matai (titled heads of Samoan families); fono (meetings, especially those of a village assembly); Tūmua (a powerful house of tulāfale [orator-chiefs] from Upolu centered in Lufilufi and Leulumoega); and Pule (the counterpart to Tūmua in Savai'i, centered on Safotulafai and Saleaula).

2 See blog "Sea Never Dry: Keba, Mama, Keba!" by "Pieter," posted 6 February 2008 at <http://seaneverdry.blogspot.com/2008/02/keba-mama-keba.html> [accessed 1 May 2009].

3 "Ia pōuliuli lou tino, ae mālamalama ou mata" (roughly, "Your body may be dark/unknowing, your eyes can see/are enlightened"). This well-known phrase has a complex history, and can be found in the "Mavaega Feula a Fe'epo": "A ū mai lou tua ia e'eli ou vae, ia pōuliuli lou tino a 'ia mālamalama ou mata, ma 'ia tafe toto ou ala" (see Tauiliili 2009, 47). The phrase is also now far better known through the lyrics of "Tama Samoa," a popular song that celebrates Sāmoa and the Manu Samoa (the Samoan national rugby team), composed by Felise Mikaele and popularized by the RSA (Reserve Servicemen Association) Band. Note also, of course, that one of Wendt's novels is titled *Pouliuli* (1977).

4 Fafā (abode of the departed spirits); Pulemelei (the largest stone mound in Polynesia, in the Palauli district, at the east end of Savai'i); Fale o le Fe'e (a structure of massive stone columns for the worship of the god Fe'e [Octopus]); fofō (traditional Samoan massage); foma'i (traditional medicinal practitioner); 'ava (*Piper methysticum* plant and the drink made from it).

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Abstract

Despite Albert Wendt's departure from the formal discipline of history as a graduate student, he has established himself at the center of an alternate, influential stream of Pacific history writing. This has turned on the crafting of a new relationship to the past that is radical and dissenting, not only against colonialism, but certain iterations of indigenous culture, politics, and tradition. Wendt pursues this not only through remembering ancestral lives and worlds, but also through inventions and innovative appropriations—such as the Samoan cowboy. Cowboys appear repeatedly in Wendt's work, often at crucial junctures. But his utilization of the cowboy is not, as some might suppose, simply imaginative. As early as 1914 Samoans had appropriated cowboy films and narratives, and cowboys were to remain compelling and powerful features in Samoan life, as they were in other colonized locations from New Zealand to the Congo. The mythic qualities of the cowboy that appealed to some Samoans are much the same as those that Wendt orchestrates in his work through cowboys. The Samoans who laid claim to being cowboys were inhabiting a renegade, dangerous masculinity, one that was decisive and good, which opposed colonialism but which was also critical of many dimensions of tradition and local life. As such, the Samoan cowboy is a specially revealing figure not only for Wendt's work, but for understanding the Samoan past.

KEYWORDS: Albert Wendt, Sāmoa, cowboys, Pacific history, westerns, colonial

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