

In the Shade of the Banyan Tree

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The figure of Albert Wendt looms larger than life in the literatures of Oceania, as a figure who invokes and remakes past representations in the process of creating Oceania anew. For this special issue in his honor, I thought I would talk story—my own and Wendt's.

My initial experience reading the new literatures of Oceania came during the first Pacific literature course taught in the English Department at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa in the early 1990s. I was a master's student at the time, hoping to find new and relevant voices to take back to the students I had been teaching at Lahainaluna High School on the island of Maui. What I read then would change my life in ways I had no way of anticipating. Under the amiable guidance of Rob Wilson—one of the few if not the only English professor then willing to acquaint us with these new literatures—we read some of the usual suspects (Jack London, Mark Twain, Herman Melville) and then launched into texts by Keri Hulme, Patricia Grace, John Dominis Holt, and, of course, the most significant novel of Wendt's varied oeuvre, *Leaves of the Banyan Tree* (1979). As I read it, my ears were instantly attuned to the voice of Pepe, that eerily resistant and disaffected tusitala (storyteller), still seeking to connect. Viewing the film *Flying Fox in a Freedom Tree* was just as mind opening (Sanderson 1990). If *Leaves* held me with the voice of the storyteller, *Flying Fox* opened up a new visual world where Pacific Islanders were on the big screen telling their own stories, not consigned to the background as bartenders and con men behind the haole stars of *Hawaii Five-O*.¹ Here were stories that, though set in distant parts of the Pacific, I felt, finally resonated in an oblique and glancing manner with my own experience of place. Though not a Pacific Islander or Hawaiian (Kanaka Maoli), I found something familiar in Wendt's novel about the way colonialism and empire had touched us in Hawai'i. Understanding and learning from this familiarity and exploring the differences have motivated much of my work in taking a comparative approach to the literatures of Oceania.

The work of Wendt and his contemporaries, such as Keri Hulme, Patricia Grace, and Witi Ihimaera, would haunt my studies as I plodded through course work and field exams (which then did not recognize the significance of this new field—no longer the case now!), at Mānoa and then in Santa Barbara. After engaging on this proving ground, I returned again to the texts that had gained an even more prominent place in my imagination. Each of the authors I studied and researched taught me—educated me, really. So, though I did not meet Albert Wendt until much later, I can say that his books have led and taught me, from afar and yet in a most intimate way. This is the power that books have.

It's a strange thing in actuality, and a profound privilege, to "study" contemporary authors, especially an open and generous soul such as Albert Wendt, who was willing to talk with some doctoral student from Hawai'i! The rich, many-faceted worlds of his novels led me to inhabit "the shed," as jazz musicians call it, and see what I could begin to discern if I read the histories of Sāmoa alongside his "fiction." And what a rich world unfolded when I read in this manner—it almost made me feel as though I were hallucinating these connections! Yet the resonances were undeniable; I merely had to follow their lead. This is how I came to my flamboyant reading of *Leaves of the Banyan Tree*, and my understanding of the Mau movement and its relation to postcolonial nationalist history (Najita 2006b). It is also how I came to understand one of the central challenges to reading literatures that engage profoundly with history, as many of the works by the first generation of Pacific writers do.

Wendt's approach in *Leaves* is particularly powerful in engaging in a difficult, double maneuver: The novel form addresses the problem of representation—both colonial and nationalist forms—and brings history to bear on our understanding of the postcolonial present and future. In addressing a region relentlessly represented for colonial and neocolonial purposes, Wendt constantly confronts the problematic of how to represent and critique without re-presenting in the dominant mode of historical and ethnographic traditions. His early work frustrates the ethnographic impulse of realism to relentlessly re-present and convey Samoan culture and tradition; his works frustrate readers—pālagi or otherwise—who seek a touristic reading experience.

In his master's thesis in history (1965), Wendt struggled with the problem of how to tell the story of the Mau, and what it meant to do that for the colonial archive—indeed, what it meant to tell a story whose stakes were greatest for those to whom it was not addressed. Instead of writing

history “straight up,” he wrote a novel that not only recuperated aspects of Sāmoa’s history but also conveyed it in fragments and glancing comparisons. Seeing this sort of “history” requires engaging in a reading methodology that I called “oppositional reading” (Najita 2006a), in which the critic reads with a “side-glancing historical eye,” attending to the intertextuality of the literary text, its ability to call on the discourses of the law, historiography, psychology, and anthropology, colonial discourses which have left their mark on our efforts to decolonize. When recalled in the space of a novel, these discourses—which are associated with the production of the absurdity of life under colonialism—are placed in the realm of the fictive, compromising their authoritative and constitutive claims to “reality.” Fiction, then, becomes a space in which to critique, interrogate, and even transform these colonial discourses, especially as they have been absorbed within indigenous culture and society.

Thus, in *Leaves*, Wendt referred surreptitiously to the history of colonial domination under the German administration, its attempt to delegitimize the power of orators (tulāfale) by, for example, instituting a national fa’alupega (ceremonial address) that honored the Kaiser and refused to recognize the chiefly authority. This discursive violence is registered in the demise of Toasa (the senior orator of Sapepe), the decline and death of Lupe (fa’alupe means to “have the title of”), and in Pepe’s rebellion against his father. The official outlawing of orality occurs when Pepe brazenly articulates his genealogy; the “pālagi-fied” judge in turn sends him promptly to prison. Even the Mau is remembered orally through Toasa’s story of “lions and aitu [spirits],” itself a memorialization of the Mau resistors who sought refuge in the bush.

In Book Two of *Leaves*, Pepe details the physical effects of his father’s attempts to discipline him. Pepe’s story invokes the testimonial spirit of the Mau, and how one of its stated goals was to bear witness to colonial rule. In a petition submitted to the New Zealand Parliament, Mau members attested to “the weight of the load we have to carry nowadays, brought about by some laws made expressly for the Samoans, oppressing us to the point of slavery” (quoted in Field 1984, 94). The word “mau” has many meanings, including to “[h]old fast,” to “stick firmly,” and “[r]ebellion, revolution”; it also means “[e]vidence” or “testimony” (Milner 1993, 139–141). Indeed, Pepe refers to his story as a “humble testament” and the account of Tagata’s suicide is entitled “Last Will and Testament of the Flying-Fox.”

The prominence of Pepe’s voice suggests the prominence of the oral

tradition in ordinary life and within anticolonial nationalism. But the relation between the story of lions and aitu and the Mau's refuge in the bush is perhaps not so obvious precisely because it is presented in highly metaphorical terms. This metaphorical referencing evokes the mystical or the "occult" qualities of the Mau during the period of colonial suppression. As Felix M Keesing argued in his 1934 study, the Mau had assumed the more "mystical form" of other organizations "forcibly thwarted." The Mau, once suppressed, became "introverted as a stubborn uncompromising mysticism and conservatism which passing decades hardly mellowed" (Keesing 1934, 178, 188–189). Keesing suggested a continuity between the two movements: the Mau a Pule, which was a response to the German colonial administration and whose power emanated from the tulāfale of Savai'i, and the Mau, which arose in response to the New Zealand presence and was primarily based in Apia. In its focus on orality, Wendt's *Leaves* also supports this continuity between these two resistance movements. For example, the mythical tone of the story of lions and aitu points precisely to this relation between earlier modes of resistance and the Mau. Tauilo's deliberate rejection of the story as a sign of Toasa's senility indicates his rejection of the Mau and his belief that Sāmoa cannot survive without New Zealand oversight.

However, Tauilo is unable to completely suppress resistance. The magnificent banyan tree remains, after all. The banyan as a metaphor for the Mau was a historical trope first developed by Keesing, who compared the Mau to a tree rooted in "the Polynesian past": "Its trunk and branches [lie] in the history of Samoan–white interaction—fed by the potent sap of cultural conflict and change, *pruned by the political knife* of the German authorities, forced by the *strong fertilizer of democratic sentiment*. The atmosphere of heat generated partly by New Zealand's enthusiastic schemes, partly through friction between the mandatory and the European community, merely brought it to sudden flower and fruit" (1934, 177; my italics). *Leaves* takes up the extended historical metaphor of the "political knife" in the figure of Tauilo who, like the German government, attempts to destroy the banyan and also the vestiges of the Mau (Toasa and Pepe). The democratic impulse that "fertilized" the Mau is presented in Tagata who describes his dead body as "excellent manure" (Wendt 1979, 227). The book itself records this history of resistance metaphorically in its own "leaves."

We might even say that the novel provides a space of critique and commentary on dominant forms of representation (such as history). In it the

author engages with the historian. Keesing argued that the Mau was a “manifestation of a cultural-pathological condition in Samoan life” which resulted from long periods of “repression, psychological stress” and “social disintegration,” aggravated by “sudden official pressure” (1934, 177). We know that Wendt disagreed somewhat with Keesing. In his master’s thesis, Wendt maintained that social disintegration itself had not occurred: “The Mau was, in itself, substantial proof that Old Samoa had weathered the century-old storm of European contact” (1965, 117). The story of lions and aitu, then, suggests precisely this argument, that the persistence of the oral tradition also registers the persistence of “Old Samoa” despite European colonial presences. What, then, is the status of history in Wendt’s novel?

The difference between Keesing’s and Wendt’s accounts has to do with their own historical vantage points. Keesing’s view of the Mau as mystical and occult came out of the period in which he wrote. In 1933 the future of the movement was still uncertain, O F Nelson having only just returned from exile in New Zealand. Keesing wrote that “at the time of writing it is not clear whether he [Nelson] will submit to the government or resume political activities or so perhaps be deported again”; the “chain of events is not complete” (1934, 187). But the history of the Mau is still not complete, even from Wendt’s vantage point. In his thesis, Wendt struggled with the problem of objectivity: “what we think about the past of Samoa (and its future) is determined by what we are. So why talk about being objective? . . . *We have recreated the past of Samoa in our own peculiar way*” (1965, 113; my italics). Wendt’s choice of words here highlights the significance of one’s temporal as well as social position: “what we are.”

But why did Wendt take such a literary approach in his thesis? I began to think about how, for Wendt, history was one of a number of other storytelling forms. Perhaps *Leaves* recorded the very contradictions that his thesis could not explore precisely because the critique he was interested in making was about what the Mau revealed about Samoan society’s complex and, indeed, divided response to colonialism. The novel, after all, explores the divided loyalties in the village of Sapepe and asks, in effect: now that the Mau has been victorious, what do those who actively supported the colonial administration do with its history in the postindependence period? This is why Pepe’s influence in the novel does not end with his own death.

Wendt’s orally inflected narration becomes the seed out of which the mysterious and troubling figure of Galupo literally emerges. Long an

admirer of the Argentine writer Jorge Luis Borges, Wendt engaged in a particularly Borgesian maneuver, one that unpacks the power of the discursive and its relation to reality. When Galupo arrives in Sapepe, he is described as a stranger with “a thin nose, a thin mouth, and hollow cheeks, *like the joker in the playing-cards* or a papalagi” (Wendt 1979, 311; my italics). This would be Galupo’s first appearance, but for a curious detail. In Book Two Pepe also describes Fanua’s husband-murderer as having the face of a “joker in a pack of playing-cards.” He compares the man to an “evil aitu,” “the other side” of himself that he has “tried all [his] life to drive out” (Wendt 1979, 222, 224). These images suggest how modern Sāmoa has internalized colonial power. Unlike other storytellers before him (Toasa, Pepe, and Tagata), Galupo uses orality to garner wealth and personal power through a form of genealogical grafting. He tells an elaborate story that lays claim to his being Tauilo’s illegitimate son by Moa. In this way, Galupo casts himself as the long-lost son returned to make whole his father’s genealogy ruptured by Pepe’s death. He reveals the postcolonial nation-state, though clothed in traditional garments, as shot through with colonial power.

Galupo creates himself as Tauilo’s “son” through an oral word game similar to the one Toasa and Pepe play earlier in the novel:

“What’s a miracle?” asked Pepe.

“A miracle?” Toasa paused and, looking at Tauilopepe, said, “That’s when something comes out of nothing and nothing comes out of something. Like when fish grow legs and walk ashore.”

“Oh,” said Pepe. Toasa laughed. He looked at Tauilopepe and dug him in the ribs with his elbow. “What kind of fish are those?” Pepe asked.

“Miracle fish,” replied Toasa.

“Can you eat them, eh?” asked Pepe, developing the joke further. (Wendt 1979, 70)

Like Toasa and Pepe creating miracle fish out of words, the narrator creates Galupo out of Pepe’s story, miraculously creating an identity where none existed before. In Book Three it is the narrator/author who exorcises Galupo, the aitu, out of the bus and literally out of the narrative itself. The phrase “joker in a pack of playing-cards” refers to Pepe’s description of Fanua’s killer. Subramani has argued that the “personality of the author-narrator seems to merge with that of Galupo. After Galupo makes his entry, the overlapping mimetic and allegorical structures, sustained skillfully in a balance so far, give way to fabulation. . . . The author-narrator,

who was a biographer and historian, becomes a mythologiser” (1992, 138). However, the chapter “The Mythology of Night-Wave” in which Galupo tells his story is actually a much more contentious battle between the narrator and the aitu exorcized out of Pepe’s narrative. This is the only chapter in which the narrative voice switches from third-person (narrator) to first-person (Galupo) point of view. These changes in voice are set off physically in the text by paragraph breaks, a full line space, and quotation marks emphasizing the distinct separation between the narrator’s voice and that of Galupo. The tone of the passages distinguishes between a third-person retrospective novelistic voice and Galupo’s impromptu “I” spoken narration more typical of the fāgogo.

Wendt’s fascination with stories was inherited from his grandmother, Mele Tuaopepe, who, he says, taught him “respect for the power of words” and “admiration for people who have the gift of words”: “Every night she would reward us with fagogo. I didn’t realize until I read Aesop’s fables and Grimm’s fairy tales in English years later that some of grandmother’s stories were from these collections, but she was telling them in the fagogo way in Samoan. Her style and versions of these were better than the originals” (Wendt 1973, 45). The fāgogo has already accommodated European forms such as the fable and the fairy tale. (This ability of Samoan culture to absorb even the colonial culture is also the topic of Wendt’s most recent novel, *The Mango’s Kiss*, as we’ll see later.)

The narrator’s and Galupo’s ability to persuade the listener that Galupo is Tauilo’s son through a bizarre sequence of events identifies him as an exceptional storyteller. The fāgogo often recounts, using the third-person point of view, a story of a child’s triumph over evil aitu. Galupo is initially the child-subject of traditional fāgogo. As such, he is objectified in the tale, not allowed to be the speaking subject of his own story since he is created out of the story itself. Being also an “evil aitu,” he is further objectified by the teller and the tale. But as the chapter progresses, Galupo controls larger portions of the narrative until he suggests to the ensnared Tauilo that he may have been “lying,” that he may not be Tauilo’s son after all (Wendt 1979, 369). The mythologizing that occurs in this chapter constitutes a Borgesian transformation: the textual world becomes the real world. And this occurs through the power of language. Galupo, the child and aitu of his own fāgogo, usurps the narrative that has created him. The narrator’s telling is so persuasive that the objectified child and aitu becomes an embodied entity who proceeds to “dictate” the narrative. In the following chapter, Galupo commands Tauilo using a second-person

point of view narration: “You sit in your study, afraid, remembering your only real son, who died unloved. Out of his ashes God has fashioned another son to destroy you. You switch on the main light to try to defeat the fearful gloom clogging your thoughts.” When the narrator resumes the third-person point of view, Tauilo is what the narrator commanded him to be: “Tauilopepe’s thoughts were silver-fish darting among his fears” (Wendt 1979, 370). Curiously, Tauilo’s disconcerting thoughts are compared to the metaphorical “miracle fish,” evoked by Toasa and Pepe as representative of the power of orality.

The transformation of object into subject is central to what Borges has called “partial magic.” The magic of fictional texts lies in their ability to cause confusion between “the world of the reader and the world of the book” (Borges 1964, 194). Borges asserted that “if the characters of a fictional work can be readers or spectators, we, its readers or spectators, can be fictitious” (1964, 196). As a voracious reader, Galupo takes the fictional worlds for reality. He is described as a miracle fish of sorts—produced out of narrative—swimming through these fiction-created worlds:

Novels in particular were his world. He lived in them as if he was swimming through a coral reef which changed shape and colour and mood continuously, watching the *fabulous* fish dancing in the wonderful silence. . . . Novelists were gods: they created worlds, fashioned and then destroyed their creations. . . .

He thought of his hut as a vibrant mind in which he read and dreamt, safe from the world. . . . The hut was his world, as distinct from what he started calling the “Other-World,” which was inhabited by “Other-Worlders.” (Wendt 1979, 360–361; my italics)

Among Wendt’s favorite books is Borges’s *Ficciones* and another particularly Borgesian one, the *Encyclopedia Britannica*. In its authoritative claim to represent the real world, the encyclopedia has the power to create the world through discourse. And, as a collection, *Ficciones* comments on this discursive production of reality. Galupo is a character in a fictional work, Wendt’s novel, but also a character in the narrator’s fāgogo, who also exists within Wendt’s world of fiction. Galupo refuses to remain in his place inside the frame of the fāgogo narrative, as an objectified character. He explodes out of the fāgogo and proceeds to control his own story. In this way, the character of Galupo enacts the adoption of the Mau’s discursive legacy by the postcolonial nation-state. The history of the Mau (Pepe’s story) is grafted onto a genealogy (Tauilo’s) that has acted explicitly in opposition to it. The fictional space of Wendt’s novel allows for a

radical critique of the way political power in postcolonial Sāmoa relies on these discursive maneuvers—all of which occur through indigenous and oral modes.

The power of fiction to comment on reality-constituting discourses continues to remain a part of Wendt's thought and practice. In *The Mango's Kiss* (2003), Wendt dedicated a chapter, "The Son of the Earl," to Borges himself. This time, the oral tradition has absorbed (perhaps monstrously) the colonial archive itself! Also, the tusitala figure of Wendt's grandmother resurfaces partially in the protagonist Peleiupu. Mautu the pastor learns English from his friend and atheist, an English trader named Ralph Barker, his stories and books. The pastor reads Barker's books aloud to his family who in this way also begin learning English. The narrator tells us, "Fairytales, fables, parables, adventures, descriptions of other lands, other seas, other sciences, other minds and eyes and dreams. His readings became a treasure house to feed the curiosity and imagination, until their home was full of listeners every night, none of his students stayed away from school, and the church was crammed full every Sunday" (Wendt 2003, 23). This fabulous world infiltrates Mautu's sermons, which take on the flavor of the colonial archive:

his sermons became fabulous stories about God's territories beyond the reefs; about courageous papalagi missionaries conquering the savage kingdoms of darkest Africa and Asia; about evil and miserly papalagi missionaries and kings seeing the Light . . . ; about papalagi explorers traversing the deserts and the lands of ice and snow, defeating heathen armies and destroying their idolatrous gods; about miraculous sciences, such as alchemy, that produced gold from worthless matter; about astrology, which explained your fate in the patterns of the stars; about the Church's valiant fight against savagery, heathenism, cannibalism and more. It was all irrefutable proof of God's existence and beneficence and mana. . . . [Their pastor] was now capable of making them believe anything. (Wendt 2003, 23–24)

Barker's storytelling ways later become part of Pele's and Tavita's storytelling, through which they ensnare almost any listener. As Mautu's skills increase, English becomes a retreat from the Christian propriety of Samoan life, an escape from his wife Lalaga's control and ambitions to "civilize the natives": "Soon his stories merged into one golden stream that wove its compelling, healing, dazzling way through the enraptured imaginations of his students. Within six months Lalaga was losing students to her ever-storytelling husband" (Wendt 2003, 35).

In *The Mango's Kiss*, stories also alter genealogy. In the chapter dedi-

cated to Borges, Mautu tells the story of Barker's life, Barker's "autobiography." It is an odd autobiography, one that references fairy tales, orientalist tales like *The Arabian Nights* and *The Adventures of Sinbad the Sailor*, and colonial adventure stories spanning the globe. Barker's life story becomes part of the memory and genealogy of Satoa, grafting Barker to the village genealogies: his stories "seal Barker's right to be 'our papalagi'" (Wendt 2003, 27). Eventually, Barker—though perhaps the only outright atheist in the village—is accepted as a Satoan when he receives his tatau and catches the Satoan disease.

Storytelling also creates a genealogical relation between Peleiupu and the Robert Louis Stevenson figure, Stenson. During her visit to the dying author, Stenson tells her the story of the death of his own daughter Marianne. Peleiupu is about the same age as Stenson's daughter at the time of the telling, suggesting that perhaps Pele reminds Stenson of his lost child. Stenson inscribes three messages to Pele in the books he gives her, one of which reads, "For my friend Peleiupu, Beloved-in-Words, for her kindness in bringing to the heart of an exile the radiant joy of youth, the gift of God." On his death, he bequeaths her his entire library, suggesting that she has become an heir to the archive. Barker's account of Stenson's death becomes a "vital story" in the "mythology" of Pele's life (Wendt 2003, 107, 113, 115).

The oral mode of storytelling, however, is constantly rivaled by the authority of the written. The truth of Barker's oral autobiography is contested by Barker's own written testament of his life contained in an epistle to Mautu, sealed in a Chinese box. In this mysterious document, Barker confesses that the earlier "autobiography" is pure—though gaudy—deception, one that hides the real madness and sickness behind the "benevolent face of Queen Victoria" (Wendt 2003, 215). The archive—and the storytelling it inspires—are revealed as a reality-constituting discourse. After all, Barker's stories about the world beyond the reef, though told orally, are inspired by the archive. And, it is these stories that motivate much of the narrative and fuel Arona's search for fabled lands—and his separation from his family. Ironically, the false promises of the colonial archive prevent Lalaga from accomplishing her own civilizing goal: Arona never fulfills her dream of converting the "pagan" natives of the village.

Stories and reality do not jibe. When Pele finds Arona much later on, he tells a disillusioned account of his life, one of crime and betrayal, not one of high adventure. So it is that the truth of Arona's own life story (as told by him) cannot be spoken in Satoa's stories, though his story can be told in written forms such as the novel itself. Indeed, the family's good name

and the village's (colonial) idealism about the world beyond the reef—that both Arona and the archive represent for them—seals the romantic lie as historical truth. In this way, the decolonizing process involves an intimate dance between the oral and the written: neither is the sole repository of “pure” tradition, since that no longer is something that can be sought. The oral absorbs colonial and imperial knowledge, but it also corrupts and works to undo the claims to salvation and civilization of the now indigenized Church. Its authority is also “challenged” by the written.

Peleiupu, Tavita, and Arona deploy Barker's storytelling ways—which have now become accepted practices—for their own particular purposes, even their revenge. The archive and storytelling are competing discourses whose boundaries cannot be clearly defined. Pele, after hearing Arona's story, says: “As I listened to him I had to try to rid myself of all the exaggerated stories, tales, rumours—in fact all the fiction and mythology that he'd become for us over the years, and I tried to see the Arona and Mautu I knew but I couldn't. And today what he told us about his life is even larger than the fiction we'd inherited. But is it any truer?” (Wendt 2003, 415). What motivates Pele's official story of Arona's life? The preservation of her family's status and the significance of Arona as a figure enthralled by the colonial imaginary: “Peleiupu gave them a laundered version. She had never considered herself a good storyteller but, as she spoke, more and more people were drawn into the fable. Their rapt attention held her, made her realise that perhaps she had inherited the gift from her parents and Barker and Stenson and all those books that had enriched her imagination. Through her telling, Arona and Areta would become rich, fabulous strands of the ie toga of lies that was their aiga, Fagaloto, and the ever-moving present” (Wendt 2003, 452). As in *Leaves*, families are divided by their role in the Mau and their loyalty to the colonial power. Peleiupu's marriage to Tavita suffers the strain of these divided loyalties. *The Mango's Kiss* might be described as a meditation on the relation between orality and the colonial archive, in particular a critical engagement with the politics of orality in the period just prior to the emergence of the Mau. Not only does the oral transform the archive by revealing it to be a construction, but the process of absorbing the archive also signals its further transformation by postcolonial nationalism.

Leaves explores the role of orality in the period of burgeoning independence and takes a historical perspective in arguing for the continuity of the oral tradition, a continuity that becomes incorporated and appropriated within contemporary stories of the postcolonial nation. *The Mango's Kiss* revisits the question of the oral tradition, but this time during the

period prior to the emergence of the Mau. Rather than taking the more mythical and metaphorical representation of orality in *Leaves*, storytelling in Wendt's more recent novel shows how the colonial archive has been incorporated within oral modes. Indeed, it is precisely this compromised notion of orality—one that is always already shot through with literate modes—that sustains the fabric of everyday life, even amidst social and political upheaval. This is the story of transformation and persistence that Wendt seeks to tell in both works.

Note

1 The term *haole* literally means “foreigner” but today, due to US colonial influence, it typically refers to white Americans.

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Abstract

This essay explores the ways that Wendt's early novel *Leaves of the Banyan Tree* and his most recent novel, *The Mango's Kiss*, engage with the history of the Mau in Sāmoa, in the period leading up to Samoan independence and in that leading to the emergence of the Mau as an overt political movement for independence, respectively. I examine how the novels' commentaries on indigenous practices of orality critique the ongoing adoption and appropriation of the discursive legacy of the Mau. In *Leaves*, the character Galupo's Borgesian practices within the genre of the fāgogo mimic the adoption of the Mau's discursive legacy by the postcolonial nation-state through a narrative of genealogical grafting. In *Mango's Kiss*, a reversal of these dynamics occurs, wherein the oral tradition itself—and the genealogy of the Mau that emerges through it—is energized and motivated by the colonial archive. It is through the English trader Ralph Barker and a British novelist named Stenson, modeled after Robert Louis Stevenson, that the colonial archive is installed in village life, serving as a “fabulous” world, literally constructed out of colonial discourse—fictional and otherwise. As in *Leaves*, storytelling alters genealogy and history, determining what realities might be contained and conveyed through these forms. In *Mango's Kiss*, the decolonizing process involves a dance between oral and written forms; the oral can accommodate imperial knowledge, but also undoes the claims to civilization of the indigenized Church. Oral practices are also challenged by written forms, even as the oral itself has profoundly accommodated the archive.

KEYWORDS: resistance to colonialism, Sāmoa, Albert Wendt, history, postcolonial nation, oral tradition