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The construction of a myth: Bloody Mary, Aggie Grey and the optics of tourism

ABSTRACT

This article examines the discursive circulation of stories in journalism and travel writing over the last fifty years that linked leading Western Samoan hotelier Aggie Grey to South Pacific's iconic Tonkinese, Bloody Mary. Made famous by Juanita Hall in the Broadway musical (1949–1954), and subsequent cinematic adaptation (Joshua Logan, 1958), Bloody Mary first appeared in James Michener's Pulitzer Prize-winning Tales of the South Pacific (written 1944–1946, published 1947). The careful marketing and growth of the Aggie Grey brand both before and after her death in 1988, exemplifies the close economic relationship between the development of tourism in Samoa in the post-war years and the American film and celebrity industries, with the hotel in Apia providing accommodation, logistical and catering support to Hollywood productions and film stars from William Holden to Marlon Brando. My examination of an origin myth linking a charismatic historical figure with an iconic fictional character is undertaken not to ultimately suggest any one-to-one relationship between the two, but rather to demonstrate a remarkable persistence of a Pacific romanticism. In what I name as the optics of tourism I join with earlier scholars in suggesting that we must be more attuned to accounting for the affective power of visual media and the ways in which Hollywood plays a continuing complex role in cultural memory, tourism and popular culture.

KEYWORDS

Bloody Mary
Aggie Grey
tourism
Samoa
South Pacific
James Michener
Rodgers and
Hammerstein

1. The Broadway musical ran from 1949 to 1954, for 1,925 performances. Bloody Mary appeared in the story 'Fo' Dollar' along with Joe Cable and Liat, while Nellie Forbush and Emile de Becque appeared in the story 'Our Heroine'.

The life and career of Aggie Grey (1897–1988), the leading Western Samoan hotelier, spanned multiple periods in Samoan history, from its time as a German colony through New Zealand administration, world war and independence. In this time frame, Aggie Grey's hotel business grew from a small boarding house known as the Cosmopolitan Club (1933) to a hamburger stand and boarding house during World War II (1940–44). A leading post-war figure in Samoan tourism, Aggie Grey was honoured with the Queen's Service Medal (1983) and was the subject of two biographies (Eustis 1979; Alailima 1988) and several stamps issued in her lifetime. The hotel that she would expand with her son Alan Grey in the post-war era (1945–present) is now an international company consisting of several resorts administered by her grandchildren, with business interests in other hotels and airlines, casinos in Western Samoa and Tahiti and, as this article went to press, globally rebranded as part of the Sheraton Hotels and Resorts chain.

This article considers the discursive circulation of stories in journalism and travel writing over the last fifty years that linked Aggie Grey to *South Pacific's* iconic, pidgin-speaking Tonkinese character, Bloody Mary. Made famous by Juanita Hall in Rodgers and Hammerstein's blockbuster Broadway musical (1949) and subsequent cinematic adaptation (Joshua Logan, 1958), Bloody Mary first appeared in several stories which formed part of James Michener's *Tales of the South Pacific* (written between 1944 and 1946 and published in 1947), which would go on to win the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 1948.¹ Different claims have been made about Aggie Grey being a partial source for Bloody Mary (Smyth 2000a; Horace Sutton 1966; Clarke 2005), both by travel journalists and by Michener himself, and, as I will discuss below, by the Aggie Grey Company's own carefully negotiated strategies over the last fifty years (see Aggie Grey's Hotel pamphlets and websites; Game 2001). The careful marketing and growth of the Aggie Grey brand, both before and after her death in 1988, exemplifies the close economic relationship between the development of tourism in Samoa in the post-war years and the American film and celebrity industries, with the hotel in Apia providing accommodation, logistical and catering support to Hollywood productions and film stars from William Holden to Raymond Burr, Robert Morley, Gary Cooper and Marlon Brando, who were working or returning to vacation in the Pacific.

My examination of an origin myth linking a charismatic historical figure with an iconic fictional character is undertaken not to ultimately suggest any one-to-one relationship between the two, but rather to demonstrate a remarkable discursive persistence of what I term a Pacific romanticism, and what some scholars have called 'Pacifist' (Lyons 2006), 'Pacific Orientalism' (Landman and Ballard 2010) or even 'complicit exoticism' (Iwabuchi 1994). The persistence of this Pacific romanticism, with its roots in much older literary and art historical traditions, in which the Pacific is represented as an idyllic physical and sexual *mise-en-scène*, and to which settler representational traditions from painting to photography and Hollywood cinema have long contributed, suggests some of the complex aesthetic interrelationships of the Pacific and the West. In what follows in my close examination of the historical figure of Aggie Grey and, more particularly, in what I name the *optics of tourism*, I join with earlier scholars in urging that we be more attuned to the affective power of visual media and the ways in which Hollywood plays a powerful continuing role in cultural memory, tourism and popular culture (see Pearson 2005; Mallon 2012).

‘EVERYONE KNOWS THAT AGGIE GREY IS BLOODY MARY’

So ran the headline in the *Free Lance-Star* that was later republished in the *Washington Post* (O’Loughlin 1977a: 7; O’Loughlin 1977b: 155). It exemplifies the means by which the myth has persisted, assuming an a priori knowledge of the primary intertext, here *South Pacific*, the musical and film. Over 80 per cent of the more than sixty New Zealand, Australian, British and North American newspaper articles, published over the last fifty years and researched for this article, reproduced the myth while framing it as ‘legend has it’, or ‘she was widely believed to be’. The myth was recapitulated in her obituaries (sometimes along with her vehement denials) in the *New Zealand Herald*, *Times*, *Guardian*, *The Advertiser* and *Los Angeles Times* when she died in 1988 (see Kennedy 1988: 1; Anon 1988d: 1; Anon 1988a; Anon 1988b; Martin 1988; Anon 1988c).

In 1984, while on a cruise, a similarly iconic figure in the representational history of American mediations on the Pacific, Dorothy Lamour, also contributed to the myth. On her first visit to the Pacific, Lamour recalled, ‘[t]he ship’s captain asked me if I’d like to meet the original Bloody Mary from *South Pacific*. Her name is Aggie Gray [*sic*] and she runs a hotel in Samoa. He invited Aggie and the Queen of Samoa and two princesses to lunch, and we had a ball’ (Anon 1986: F4). According to the Grey family, and widely reported in New Zealand and US newspapers, the origins of the Bloody Mary story lay in American author Willard Price’s disgruntlement (see Ellis 2013b; Maguire 1976; Horace Sutton 1966). In an interview in 1976, Aggie said:

No, I don’t believe I am the original of Bloody Mary. It all happened because of a disagreement with an American author called Willard Price. He came here to write about the islands and wanted to stay at the hotel, but he wanted special treatment – a separate little house away from the other guests, so he would not have to eat with them. I told him I didn’t have enough room. He was very angry. Later he wrote a book, ‘Adventures in Paradise’ [published in 1955].

(Maguire 1976: 58)

Aggie is mentioned several times in Price’s book where she is described as the ‘boarding house keeper and prototype for Bloody Mary’, who inherits the ‘native house built for Gary Cooper in *Return to Paradise*’ (Price 1956: 237). In the Tahiti section, in a story about how Errol Flynn met his first wife Tiger Lil, Aggie Grey is yoked together with real hoteliers like Tia Bates from Peru, as well as fictional characters like Somerset Maugham’s notorious Sadie Thompson in the short story ‘Rain’: ‘Down yonder there is a character called Tiger Lil who is as colourful as Tia Bates, Aggie Grey or Sadie Thompson’ (Price 1956: 30). Whilst Maugham’s ‘Rain’ is set in Pago Pago, Aggie lived in Apia, Western Samoa, but she once ran a bar called ‘Happy Hour’ in Pago Pago, from which she was purportedly deported in the early 1930s (Alailima 1988: 206). Characteristic of much of Price’s writing, and indeed that of other Euro-American writers of the pre- and post-war periods, *Adventures in Paradise* recycles an older European literary romanticism in which real spaces in Samoa, Tahiti, Fiji and the Cook Islands were repeatedly mapped onto western figures, including people like Paul Gauguin and Pierre Loti, Charles Nordhoff and James Hall, with whom they had literary and cultural associations. Indeed, the interchangeability of these fictional and

2. Some of this confusion may lie in the fact that both Françoise Gardel and the unnamed Tonkinese worker were composite sources for Bloody Mary and both may have lived on Vanuatu and New Caledonia. Thurston Clarke claims that Michener paid Gardel to retire in New Caledonia, (correspondence with David Ellis and articles by Ellis [2008, 2010, 2013a, 2013b]). There are also Bloody Mary restaurants in New Caledonia and in Bora Bora, French Polynesia.

non-fictional characters, together with their literary referents, is so persistent in contemporary tourism and its promotional travel writing, that it might be considered a form of discursive neo-romanticism.

In 1966, Horace Sutton of the *Chicago Tribune* relayed the earliest version of the Bloody Mary origin story that I could find, where Aggie refers to an unnamed 'sourpuss' writer responsible for the legend. Sutton describes Aggie dancing a 'torrid siva' on a Vancouver P & O ship, and that 'when the ship docked, the headline was 'P and O Liner Arrives with Bloody Mary' (Sutton 1966: I10). Frank Riley of the *Los Angeles Times* added the details that Aggie was on a cruise ship bound from Honolulu to Vancouver via San Francisco, and warmed up her siva with four preparatory whiskeys 'just to get in the right mood for the party' (Riley 1975). Because a reporter from the *Vancouver Sun* was aboard, the 'story grew from there' and 'a legend was born' with Aggie explaining the genesis of the myth as one born in alcohol: 'it was those four whiskeys' (Riley 1975). A year later, the *Australian Women's Weekly* issued its own version of the story, quoting Aggie, and claiming that the events occurred in 1936, and not 1958:

[t]here was that incident on the Oronsay [...] It was the ship's gala night with 1200 at the party [...] the band played the Fijian song 'Isa Lei' as I came on. I was dressed in tapa cloth. And I danced, and the crowd went wild and yelled like lunatics. That night I danced till dawn then ate steak and eggs for breakfast.

(Maguire 1976: 58)

The story continues:

[t]he next morning the steward knocked and said 'Your tea lady' [...] he asked: 'Mrs Aggie Grey ... aren't you Bloody Mary of the South Pacific?' I said: 'Not as far as I know.' He said: 'But everyone is saying you are – it's in a book in the ship's library and people are queuing up to read it.' I asked to see it and it was *Adventures in Paradise*. By the time the ship arrived in Vancouver, newspaper headlines were screaming 'Bloody Mary is here.'

(Maguire 1976: 58)

Reporter Frank Riley asked, 'was Aggie Grey the inspiration for James Michener's Bloody Mary? Only Aggie could have answered this question for a generation of South Pacific travelers, and Aggie has played it cool – not saying yes, never quite saying no' (Riley 1975).

Michener's own origin stories for Bloody Mary shifted between the character coming from New Caledonia or Vanuatu.² In his autobiography *The World is My Home*, Michener admitted 'basing Bloody Mary on a Tonkinese plantation worker' who was one of several indentured workers from North Vietnam (Tonkin) working on a plantation, to the west of Luganville in Vanuatu, belonging to a French copra grower Aubert Ratard, the partial model for *South Pacific's* Emile de Becque (Michener 2007: 149; see also Clarke 2005: 51). In 'New Tales of the South Pacific', Michener said there was 'a long row of little cabins in which [Ratard]'s Tonkinese field-workers lived. One of these women, a betel-chewing woman with a profane vocabulary, struck my fancy and became the character Bloody Mary in my novel about this part of the world' (Michener 1987: 2). In 1986, Michener

returned to Vanuatu for the first time since the war for an interview with television journalist Diane Sawyer (Sawyer 1999), where they revisited the former plantation where the houses of Ratard's indentured Tonkinese labourers were still standing. According to Michener, another contender for the model of Bloody Mary was Françoise Gardel, another entrepreneurial hostess re-encountered by him on this visit (she was then 93 years old) (Clarke 2005: 51), whom he described as an 'amazing French woman almost 20 years older than I ... She was a buccaneer, a feisty woman who played the American brass like a fiddle' (Michener 1987: 2). The opportunistic, entrepreneurial nature so central to the fictional Bloody Mary is similarly echoed in Michener's description of Aggie as 'ebullient, effervescent, outrageous, illegal and terribly bright. She and her crew must have bilked the American forces out of a couple of million dollars worth of services, and never was wartime money better spent' (Michener 1978).

Yet despite Michener claiming that he had long finished writing the manuscript when he met Aggie, literary historian Stephen Jay May's history of Michener's career reports that he did the bulk of the writing of *Tales of the South Pacific* at the end of 1944 and the beginning of 1945, which was after he had visited Aggie the six or so times he acknowledged (May 2009: 66–67).³ Although Michener claimed that he could not understand the genesis of what he termed 'the Bloody Mary slander' musing '[h]ow anyone could compare this charming *afakasi* lady of Apia with the Tonkinese plantation worker of New Caledonia, who sold shrunken human heads for fifty dollars, is still mystifying to me' (Alailima 1988: ix), elsewhere he would frequently say, '[b]ut Aggie could easily have been her model – the good parts anyway' (Kennedy c.1987; see also Bick 1998: 202). Aggie herself reported that she had asked Michener if she was the model for Bloody Mary and that 'he was very non-committal [...] He said if I was, it was only the nice part of the character. I was unhappy about being called 'Bloody Mary' but my children thought it was very funny' (Maguire 1976: 59; see also Kennedy c.1987; Bick 1998: 202). According to her granddaughter, Aggie Grey Jr., 'Aggie was very angry that the name Bloody Mary had stuck. She wrote a strong letter to James Michener' (Bick 1998: 202). Aggie's sister, Mary Croudace, hotel entrepreneur and owner of The Casino and other establishments, was also occasionally referred to as Bloody Mary. Croudace acerbically observed to the *New York Times* that '[t]here is no Bloody Aggie in [*Tales of the South Pacific*]' (Trumbull 1969: 21).⁴

At Aggie's request, Michener wrote 'Love Letter to Aggie' for her biographer Nelson Eustis, to respond to the Bloody Mary stories once and for all, and this letter was published in *Savali News* (Michener 1978). In that letter, although Michener says 'Aggie was not the prototype of Bloody Mary; that worthy Tonkinese was on paper long before I met Aggie', his letter acknowledges her role in his characterization:

When I returned to New York to edit the manuscript of my first book and I needed a reference point as to what Bloody Mary would do or say, I simply recalled Aggie and had my answer ... it was Aggie, and she alone, who fortified my writing in the editing stage, who remained as the visualization of the island manipulator when the play was in formation, and who lives, in a curious way, as the real-life Bloody Mary.

(Michener 1978; see also Eustis 1979: 117; Field 1997 and 2010).

3. May incorrectly states that Aggie's father was Scottish (he was English, from Lancashire), although May probably got this information from Michener himself who repeats the same inaccuracy (Michener 2007: 37). Even the Grey family has reproduced this error in a hotel leaflet (Aggie Grey's Hotel, *The Legend of the South Seas*).
4. Michener's autobiography reveals that one of the cases he is sent to investigate in Western Samoa was the lovesick American general who had fallen in love with Aggie's younger sister, Mary Croudace née Swann (reputed to be a great beauty in her youth), and for whom the road across the mountains of Upolu had been built 'at great expense to the American taxpayer', purportedly so that the general could be closer to her (Michener 2007: 38, 88).

Michener's observations elsewhere on the matter were quite frank:

Why do I say Aggie was important to me when I was trying to write? Because she taught me so much about the South Pacific, because she encouraged me to go to distant islands, and because she taught me the songs, the dances and customs. Such things are the backbone of writing, and without those days at Aggie's sitting in the corner and listening I might never have found the courage to make the big attempt, and without the experiences at Aubert Ratard's plantation and Mme. Gardel's, I might have had nothing to say when I did start, I could never have written *Tales of the South Pacific*.

(Michener 1986: 6)

It seems clear that Bloody Mary was a composite of an unnamed Tonkinese worker, Madame Gardel, and aspects of Aggie's character and personality. For Rob Wilson, Bloody Mary's racial hybridity frames her opportunism as both interstitial figure and literal go-between to American lieutenant Joseph Cable and her daughter Liat; he describes Mary as 'a transnational body who merges Tonganese superstition and Tonkinese Chinese venality into a toxic Asian/Pacific brew of bad English, stinking body and clownish manners' (Wilson 2000: 173). Like the 1932 Betty Boop cartoon *Bamboo Isle* (Shamus Culhane, Fleischer Bros.), with its pastiche of Royal Samoan Orchestra performers, Hawai'ian music, Tahitian dancing and African and African American caricatured 'natives', Bloody Mary's hula skirts, betel nuts, shrunken heads and 'boar's teeth' typify Tiki-kitsch representational practices and hybrid touristic artefacts in the pre- and post-war periods (see Brunt 2012: 353; Mallon 2012: 347), as well as sharing obvious continuities with American racial caricatures. Yet, as Jim Lovensheimer's careful research of the Oscar Hammerstein and Michener papers shows in his recent study *South Pacific: Paradise Rewritten*, the etymological origins of the unknown Tonkinese plantation worker's nickname lay less in her betel-chewing habits, and more in her bloody-minded opposition as an indentured worker. In Michener's autobiography he described it this way:

It was her strong resistance to French colonialist exploitation and a resistance seen by the French as leftist or even pro-Communist, that earned her the nickname 'Bloody' Mary. Local workers mirrored her resistance throughout the New Hebrides and New Caledonia, which she implied would also lose their indentured workers after the war. 'We all go home. Plantation all finish.'

(cited in Lovensheimer 2010: 165)

Bloody Mary's anti-colonial resistance is transformed in Michener's characterization in 'Fo' Dolla' into an irascible, irrepressible entrepreneur: a capitalist trader who prompts Luther Billis and others to try to break into her game. As Lovensheimer tells us, years later during the Vietnam war, Michener would again remember Bloody Mary's words of resistance, wondering if the 'enemy consisted of millions of determined people like [her]', retrospectively acknowledging that in the 1940s he had falsely 'depicted her not as a potential revolutionary but as a Tonkinese woman with a pretty daughter to care for' (Lovensheimer 2010: 165).

Damon Salesa's work on racial crossing and the privileged-yet-troublesome half-caste (or *afakasi*) communities in the interwar period in Samoa has



Figure 1: Aggie Grey at the Socialite Club, first on the left in the second row, Apia, Western Samoa. Photographer: A. J. Tattersall. PAColl-3062-3-20. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand.

demonstrated how racial definition was dependent on ‘social, political and legal criteria’ and not on physical or genetic categories (Salesa 2000: 101). Bloody Mary is an intriguing fictionalized version of the *afakasi* world of which Aggie was part. On the one hand, the class status of the Socialite Club, Apia, where Aggie Grey was photographed by A. J. Tattersall in the 1920s (see Figure 1), might suggest a world of privilege far from the indentured servitude of Bloody Mary, in which ‘a small number of half-castes were legally recognized as such, and thus became Europeans’ (Salesa, 2000: 101). As a daughter of English chemist William Swann and a Samoan mother, Pele (daughter of Pepe Maiava and the *taupou* of Toamua village), Aggie typified Salesa’s privileged *afakasi* community, marrying, in turn, two *palagi* (white/non-Samoan) husbands, Gordon Hay-McKenzie and Charles Grey. On the other hand, the erratic health of her two husbands and Charles Grey’s bankruptcy also meant that much of the 1920s and 1930s were financially difficult for Aggie. Her bar-keeping in both Pago Pago and Apia marked her as one of Salesa’s troublesome half-castes – not for political reasons, like her close friend Taisi Nelson, but for social reasons, she was subject to moral suspicion, unjustly resulting in her deportation from Pago Pago around 1933, and a later police raid in Apia in 1935 (see Alailima 1988: 206, 215; Eustis 1979: 96). Aggie agitated for a liquor licence for her new bar, The Cosmopolitan at the old British Club, and as she indignantly reported:

... the Germans who stayed after [the First World War] broke out – those who had married Samoans – applied to the authorities for a license to run a club where they could drink. When they got it I was so

mad. I figured that if the Germans who we fought against and beat in the war could get a license, then so should we Samoans.

(Kennedy c.1987)

The persistence of the Aggie Grey-as-Bloody Mary story, together with its repeated reiteration by the Samoan and South Pacific tourism industry, suggests the continued economic value of *South Pacific* as a theatrical myth for the North American, European and Australasian tourist markets. Staged for decades around the world after the Broadway version closed (and revived on Broadway again in 2008), the musical provided Michener with a steady income of \$10,000 a year for decades (May 2009: 96). In a similar fashion to Michener's careful non-responses when asked about Bloody Mary's origins, consider the ways in which the Aggie Grey company has walked a fine line in both embracing and disavowing the myth of Bloody Mary. While we may remember Aggie's words that 'I do not take it as a compliment when people say I am Bloody Mary [...] I have fought against this for a long time but they still believe I was her' (Kennedy 2011: 9), a photo of Aggie with original Broadway cast member Mary Martin who visited the hotel in Apia in the 1950s (see Figure 2) remains on display in Aggie Grey's Hotel in Apia today. This image also appears on the Aggie Grey Lagoon resort's leaflets and websites. Indeed, in an interview for *Savali News* in 1977, Aggie herself acknowledged the economic benefits of the myth, observing that 'it made the hotel popular and it brought in money' (Anon 1977: 5). Moreover, her daughters [Maureen and Pele] responded to the Bloody Mary story in the *Hartford Courant* in 1972 with 'Marvelous publicity Mother' (Kinkead 1972: 3F).



Figure 2: Original South Pacific cast member Mary Martin (left) with Aggie Grey. Published with permission of Tanya Grey.

There is also a long history of marketing in the hotel's promotional materials over the last fifty years, which carefully situate Aggie as a legend. They link her star status with the numerous movie stars – Dorothy Lamour, Marlon Brando, Gary Cooper, William Holden – that have visited the hotel and whose names adorn its traditional Samoan guest *fales* (huts). 'Rest your head where the stars have slept' is one line from the hotel's website that markets the iconicity of the hotel as one both affectively resonating with and produced by its spatialization of celebrity culture (see Aggie Grey's Hotel 2012 and 2013a). The hotel website even implies a link to the famous eponymous drink, 'Where a Bloody Mary is ridiculously cheap' (see Aggie Grey Hotel 1980sa, *The Legend of the South Seas*).⁵ Built in 2005, Aggie's lagoon resort even has a South Pacific Restaurant and a Bloody Mary's Bar, and hotel promotional literature is studded with quotes and allusions to James Michener and *The Tales of the South Pacific*.

The growth of the Aggie Grey brand was closely connected to post-war developments in South Pacific tourism. The introduction of TEAL and Pan Am flights from Hawai'i to American Samoa (see Fairbairn-Dunlop 2005: 67–68), were opportunities for expansion that the hotel seized. From the 1951 contract Aggie signed with TEAL to house and feed half their passengers (for Coral Route stopovers to Samoa which began in 1952), to the later deals with Polynesian Airlines and Air New Zealand to provide catering for direct flights from Pago Pago to Apia (1959) and Pago Pago to Sydney (1962), contracts provided economic security for the hotel (Alailima 1988: 269).⁶ Air routes were not just good for business in bringing increased numbers of tourists, they also brought film productions. These film shoots provided ancillary revenue streams



Figure 3: Aggie Grey in front of Pan Am plane for the inaugural flight from American Samoa to Sydney, Mascot Airport, 1 December 1962. Photographer: John Mulligan; National Library of Australia. Record ID 24573803.

5. The mythical linkage was not just to Michener's fictional character but even to the Bloody Mary drink itself, or at least according to a reporter for the *Bay of Plenty Times* in 2008, who conflated her urban legends: 'Aggie Grey, who died in 1988, was apparently the inspiration for the Bloody Mary drink. Nowadays, it has become de rigueur to have a Bloody Mary at Aggie's' (Anon 2008: A18). Peter O'Loughlin claimed that 'Aggie owes a lot of her fame to a drink named Tom Collins. Aggie says 'Boy, that Tom Collins. The Americans drank so much of it I was shoving dollars under the mat, under the icebox, and everywhere' (O'Loughlin 1977b: 155). From these recurrent elements it is certainly clear that the culture of drinking is central to tall tales and origin myths.
6. Aggie Grey's Hotel Inc. was a charter member and stockholder in Polynesian Airlines (Alailima 1988: 274).

7. The Kon-Tiki Museum's claims for Thor Heyerdahl's pivotal role in the tiki craze of the 1950s may be somewhat overstated. For a longer cultural history of tiki kitsch see Kirsten (2003).

such as the jobs that Aggie's partner Fred Fairman did for Mark Robson's *Return to Paradise*, constructing the mess hall, shower, office and sheds and installing a generator, while Aggie trained Roberta Haynes to siva. The income from these streams supplemented the hotel accommodation provided for the cast and crew at a financially difficult point when the passengers from the new Coral Route stopover had not yet begun (they would start in October 1952) (Air New Zealand 2006: 5). One year later, as the *Samoa Bulletin* reported, with the film-makers in town, there was so much extra cash in Apia that prices rose 11.5 per cent (Anon 1952: 1; cited in Alailima 1988: 271).

Citing Robert C. Schmitt's study of Hawai'ian films, Rob Wilson has suggested that the *mise-en-scène* of many post-war American movies like *South Pacific*, which were set on ships, aircraft, boats or submarines in the Pacific, produced a military gaze constructing a mode of visibility which he calls the *optics of the Cold War* (Schmitt 1988: 6; cited in Wilson 2000: 168). I want to rework this to offer a related term, the *optics of tourism*, remembering that the history of World War II in the Pacific was inextricably linked with the development of post-war tourism, from the airports, roads and buildings the war brought, to the increase in traffic, artefact trading and post-war visits it prompted, and which was exemplified by the wartime career and post-war tourism of James Michener. It is an *optics* because it is attuned to the power of visual media in film and television, cartoons and advertising, in constructing national myths and reproducing shared histories. The optics of tourism link fictional characters like Bloody Mary with historical figures like Aggie Grey, who in turn market and align themselves with these figures, recognizing their undeniable economic benefits but also emotional valences. Thus, the optics of tourism understands the affective power of what Sarina Pearson has described as 'the residual meanings, desires and values attached to the photographic and cinematic archive of a particular region' (Pearson 2010: 108). This is exemplified by older Euro-American literary and cinematic traditions from Robert Louis Stevenson to Michener, and from F. W. Murnau to Mark Robson, as one in which specific literary and cinematic figures are linked to specific spaces marketed and promoted by the tourism industry. This neo-romanticist turn is also epitomized by the 2012 release of the film *Kon-Tiki* (Joachim Rønning and Espen Sandberg), a cinematic retelling of the story of adventurer and media sensation Thor Heyerdahl, whose expedition, it has been suggested, played a role in the 'tiki kitsch' craze of the 1950s and 1960s (Kon-Tiki Museum 2012: 23).⁷ What Paloma Fresno Calleja has called the 'endless recycling' of neo-colonial and global discourses in advertising, tourism and cinema is epitomized by this nostalgic reiteration of an older Pacific romanticism (Fresno Calleja 2013: 1).

However, the optics of tourism also recognizes a shared investment in the affective pull of space, in which the emotive dimension of imaginary historical spaces produced by the Pacific visual archive explains their strategic success as marketing devices in global tourism. While Wilson describes this phenomena as the 'postwar inscription[s] of local places and peoples masquerading as historical deep memory', I think he is too dismissive in framing these practices as postmodern pastiche (Wilson 2000: 167). The renaming of local Pacific spaces in homage to cinematic texts recognizes the affective valency of films that were shot in spaces like Lefaga Beach in Samoa, named for many years in the 1970s and 1980s as 'Return to Paradise Beach' by the hotel industry and by companies like Aggie Grey's that ran tourist excursions there. 'Return to Paradise' is also the name of a new resort (that opened in Samoa in May 2014)

whose nostalgic naming not only has a genesis in the original production but an emotive component too, in which the owners state on their website:

The link between this film and the people of this village (Matautu-Lefaga) is dear, as the film's supporting actors were actual residents and family members of not only some of the residents here, but also of some of those involved with the Resort itself.

(Return to Paradise 2013)⁸

Specific beaches in Kauai, which were shooting locations in *South Pacific*, or in Oahu for *Blue Hawaii*, are parallel examples of the affectively complex and often financially beneficial relationships between local economies, global tourism and Hollywood. These practices exemplify what Mallon describes as characteristic of tourist art in the post-war period, namely as a hybrid 'co-construction of tourists and indigenous peoples' (Mallon 2012: 385).

In this regard, the optics of tourism are in dialogue with Hollywood mediation and the continuing power of its archive to shape memory and identity in contemporary Pacific art practices. Fresno Calleja's study of three literary texts by Victor Rodger, Sia Figiel and Tusiata Avia challenges earlier critiques of Pacificism or Pacific Orientalism, arguing instead that by 'interpolating dominant cinematic modes, [these artists] strategically embrace the performative qualities of Hollywood's narratives to construct alternative postcolonial spectacles' (Fresno Calleja 2013: 275). Works like Sima Urale's short film *Velvet Dreams* (2008) appropriate and rework Hollywood genres like film noir, adopting a critical perspective on their subject matter while recognizing aesthetic and emotive value in velvet paintings and other kitsch artefacts (see Pearson 2005; Smith 2008). Rodger's published play *My Name is Gary Cooper*, which first premiered with the Auckland Theatre Company in 2007, deals centrally with the film *Return to Paradise*, and the emotional figure of Gary Cooper, turning him into a literal father figure in the play. From *My Name is Gary Cooper* to his most recent work *Black Faggot* (staged at the Auckland Fringe Festival, in 2013), Rodger's work as a gay *afakasi* man engages with the complicated intersections between personal identity, memory and the cultural mediations of Hollywood (see Whiteside 2013). Pacific artists like Rodger and Urale are part of diasporic communities historically shaped by the economic and historical changes effected by war, development and tourism. While the case of Aggie Grey's mythic circulation as Bloody Mary is an obvious instance of the continued economic advantages of the marketing and recirculation of nostalgic Pacific romanticism, it also recognizes, as does the work of Urale and Rodger, that these images and stories are not merely about the failure of the indexical, or about false representations, but rather about aesthetic re-appropriations in dialogue with media histories and their cultural circulation. As the World War II generation passes out of living memory, the nostalgic reiteration and hybridization of cinematic imagery exemplified by the optics of tourism articulates some of the ways in which their children and grandchildren are critically engaging with the affective power of the visual archive in the Pacific today.

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8. The resort states on its website that 'Return To Paradise Resort & Spa is being built on the exact location as featured in the 1953 Gary Cooper classic *Return To Paradise*'.

A personal disclaimer: I am related to the Grey family by marriage through my aunt Marina Thompson, who married Alan Grey, Aggie's son. Aggie was a second grandmother to me, and this article is offered in the spirit of great respect and *alofa* for Aggie and the family's contributions to Samoan tourism. I also dedicate this article to my father Einer Thompson, Marina's brother, whose stories and collection of historical artefacts have left me with a deep love for Samoa's history.

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