Island Culture

I want to make a brief, and I think appropriate, comparison. 1959 was an eventful year for island folk, both in the Pacific and in the Caribbean. Not only did Hawai‘i get voted into the American Union, but Cuba, quite contrarily, proclaimed its independence from the Fulgencio Batista government and the specter of U.S. Imperialism. Interestingly, three months (83 days) after its New Year revolution, the first cultural decree of Castro’s new government was the formation of ICAIC, the Instituto de Cubano Arte e Industria Cinematográfico (Institute for Cuban Cinematographic Art and Industry). In the 44 years since, Cuba, a country with scant the economic resources and industry of Hawai‘i has produced some of the most provocative cinema in the history of the medium, including films like Humberto Solas’ expressionistic Lucia from 1968, and Tomás Gutiérrez Alea’s 1994 Fresa y Chocolate.

The reason for Cuba’s cinematic proactivity and Hawai‘i’s inactivity in this cultural-ideological realm is no doubt due in part to a similar recognition by the state of the immense pedagogic power and legitimizing quality of cinematic and televisual narrative. Immediately, Cuban artists and intellectuals started to churn out what would become a legacy of newsreels, innovative documentaries and informational films, shorts, animation and features. In September, six months after the formation of ICAIC, the American Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) and Warner Brothers TV (Warner Bros.) would debut its own form of cultural-ideological entertainment, the private eye series Hawaiian Eye (HE). Unfortunately, no real local or territorial industry ever took off in Hawai‘i for fictional audiovisual narrative—at least none that attempted to compete regionally, nationally or globally. Despite fiscal and political setbacks, Cuba has remained committed to internal film and television production. Hawai‘i, meanwhile, has continued to function primarily as an exotic backlot for foreign productions.¹

The First Cycle

In discussing the sale of telefilms to foreign countries during the export hey-day of the
1950s and 60s, media historian Erik Barnouw observed that “like missionary expeditions of another era,” American television “seemed to serve as an advance herald of empire. Implicit in its arrival was a web of relationships involving cultural, economic, and military aspects, and forming the basis for a new kind of empire.” The psychological and material parameters of this empire find aesthetic expression in a late-twentieth century cycle of television shows featuring Hawai`i as home-base and exotic backdrop to Euro-American men, their Lieutenants, sidekicks, and love interests. *HE, Hawaii Five-0,* and *Magnum P.I.* form a discursive arc that intersects the hallowed spaces and mediated flows of myth and history, local and global politics, federal and indigenous ideology, as well as the economics, culture and technologies of a networked society.

The *Oxford Dictionary* defines “paramilitary” as: “ancillary to and similarly organized to military forces.” While the logistics and hierarchies of audiovisual production at times resembles the military operation, my use of the term paramilitary relates to the diegetic rehearsal of armed enforcement and control, as seen in military, combat, western, sci-fi, police, detective and an increasing number of reality genres. The first cycle of paramilitary series in Hawai`i helped shape popular perceptions of what Hawai`i is and the nature of its social, demographic and political constituencies in the latter half of the 20th century. The cycle adds up to nearly a quarter century worth of first-run programming on network TV. *HE* was the first of the cycle and ran for a respectable four years—1959-1963; *Five-0*—1968-1980—ran for a detective series record of twelve seasons straight; and *Magnum*—1980-1988—the follow up success, ran eight straight years, coinciding exactly with the Reagan years in office.

The inclusion of Hawaiian and other ethnic types in the Hawai`i first cycle context marks an important steppingstone in the politics of media representation in America, and the world in general. But the appearance of such characters on the broadcast tube never guaranteed a representative voice would be heard, or even allowed to speak. When the Hawaiian perspective is foregrounded, or when locals take active roles in episodes, the underlying politics of the shows often become concomitantly exposed.

This dialectic reveals itself in episodic television in the form of pseudo-histories that attempt to (re)define the relationship between plantation authority, for example, and Hawaiian landlessness and subservience. In particular, such episodes try to justify the usurpation of Hawaiian authority by enlightened colonial humanists. Inevitably the paramilitary hero serves as the vehicle of law, compassion and recuperation for both Hawaiian and White factions. Certain tropes and iconographies recur in such discursive enunciations. It is important to unpack such
iconographies and the tropes they suggest in an effort to write back into the discourse that which the auteurs tend to elide, or to contextualize that which has been institutionalized, historically assumed, naturalized, or, as in the case of the tiki, to reveal how such discourses position the viewer to consume sound and image in directed ways. For symbolic utterances, inflections and clusters are often underpinned and informed by elaborate discursive traditions.

**The Buttocks of Captain Cook**

The legend of Captain James Cook for instance, a hotly contested narrative, is used by all three of the series to define, justify or identify its heroes in Hawai‘i space. The Cook analogy is an important factor in understanding the paramilitary cycle in Hawai‘i, for the detective/hero, like the 20th century anthropologist and archeologist, inevitably takes up the explorer/navigator role within the series, looking for clues, discovering exotic locales, erotic entanglements, solving crime, negotiating relationships, leading natives, translating for tourists, essentially becoming the new high priests of the tropics, albeit with a gun in hand, and access to high technology, military infrastructure, and unlimited funding.

Such a trope inevitably collides with other subtropic mainstays, such as the mystic power of the tiki, the benevolence of the primitive native, the authority of the foreign professor, the acquiescence of tribal elders and the inevitable seduction of the explorer by irrepressible women. The myth of Cook is central to understanding the narrative logic of the paramilitary cycle, and a key example of the necessity for writing a history that acknowledges series influences not usually taken into consideration for a television study of this sort.

Cook of course will forever be associated with Hawai‘i not so much on the basis of his “discovery” of the archipelago in 1778, but more viscerally because of his death and dismemberment at the hands of irate Hawaiians less than one year later at Kealakekua Bay. The heartfelt, often rancorous debates in academic circles and popular histories over the meaning of Cook’s death suggests that popular and historic narra-
tive (including TV narrative) in the region continue to function as lightening rods for struggles over cultural and geopolitical power and legitimacy. Often such debates in Oceania, and there are several of them—Sahlins and Obeyeskere, Mead and Freedman, Trask and Linnekin—are framed as intensely partisan campaigns that attempt to leverage the force of academic reputation, command of secondary resources, and fraternity standing as lynchpins for theoretical rationales.

Academic writing and theories of such sort are not culturally or historically inconsequential. Rather, they have tremendous social and cultural impact, and often unintended repercussions, as Haunani Trask has argued in regards to the Navy’s use of anthropological treatises to substantiate their war-game bombing of the island of Kaho’olawe. Thus the importance of historical accuracy in the interpretation of symbolic (i.e., iconographical) communications is paramount, especially since the history of the past is often used to justify and historicize the present. The narrativization of Captain Cook under the rubric of his assumed godhood, for instance, or perception of his godhood by Hawaiians, is problematic if in fact the historical moment is other than the generic interpretation. In fact, undervalued evidence suggests that alternative interpretations of this complex moment are warranted.

For example, despite the erudition of Marshall Sahlins’ dense analysis of the mytho-poetics and structural apotheosis of Cook from the Hawaiian perspective, the long overlooked buttocks of the Captain tell another tale (no pun intended). Though historiographers and anthropologists have tended to overlook or explain away the nocturnal presentation of six to eight pounds of leaf-wrapped “hind parts”, the horrified crew and officers of the Resolution and Discovery tell another tale (no pun intended). Though historiographers and anthropologists have tended to overlook or explain away the nocturnal presentation of six to eight pounds of leaf-wrapped “hind parts”, the horrified crew and officers of the Resolution and Discovery fully comprehended the nonverbal, symbolic insult, as is evidenced by their equally symbolic reply. Days later, after the presentation of the Captain’s buttocks, and other acts of derision, like the slapping of buttocks and parading in British regalia, the Englishmen would murder several defenseless villagers of Kealakekua, after the masses and warriors of Ka’awaloa had departed. They then decapitated their victims and impaled the heads on spears, waving them with taunts to the people in the hills.

The Lesson of Corporeal Politics

Where verbal communications prove inadequate, the language of the body conveys context and subtext in extraordinary ways. The idolatry of apotheosis is problematized for instance by the politics of corporeal violence. Hawaiians were in a state of war when Cook sailed into their waters. The British ships were clearly viewed as vessels of significant military capacity. Cook was clearly a capable if not gifted navigator and leader of men. Oceanic cultures had great respect for those who could navigate the vast waters of the region. My purpose here is not to write a new truth about the Cook saga, but to cast a reasonable doubt over institutionalized interpretations, while suggesting a more proactive role for Hawai’i politicos and intelligentsia.

In this way, institutional and commercial culture indebted to the Cook myth for structure and narrative sensibilities, are necessarily called into question for the socio-political assumptions they support, the hierarchies they naturalize, and the mysteries they inevitably resolve.

There is of course a certain historical and ethical accountability that goes into the framing of narrative and images. Ethnographic, archeological and anthropological discourses are tapped to contextualize and substantiate the televisual world, especially when natives, tikis or grass shacks are at hand. For better or worse, the frame is always strictly controlled: this is both an artistic and institutional imperative. The narrative iconicity of White supremacy in Hawai’i is partly rationalized by “official” theories of first contact relations. The pseudo-histories that results depict a tourist-friendly, accessible Hawai’i, where natives drive cabs, serve as doormen, bartenders, helpers and fire-dancers, or
occasionally play knuckle-headed muscle. Such activities are generally staged on the narrative periphery of White-on-White conflict and romance, color in this case connoting both an ideal national subject on the one hand, and an ideal subservient position for the local on the other. Hawai‘i in this way serves as the exotic threshold of Americanized space.

**Discourse in the Pacific**

Just three months after Hawai‘i officially became the fiftieth state, and seven years after the debut of television in the islands, ABC-TV, the third place network in terms of territorial density, would launch *HE*, the first prime time television series to call Hawai‘i home. At the same time ABC launched another Warner Bros. series about the forty-ninth state called *The Alaskans*, starring the young Englishman Roger Moore. While *The Alaskans* filmed just thirty-six episodes before being canceled, *HE* would broadcast 134 episodes. It would also set a generic precedent to be followed in 1968 by the phenomenally successful *Five-0*, and then its successor, *Magnum*, both of which were CBS productions. *Five-0* broadcasted 279 episodes on first run network TV, while *Magnum* broadcasted 157 episodes. These three series span the Cold War decades, stretching from 1959 through 1988.

Much of the success of the first cycle is credited to the aura and mystique of the islands themselves. And yet, *HE* was filmed primarily at the Warner Bros. studios in Burbank, California, with special episodes and stock exteriors shot on location in Hawai‘i. *Five-0* and *Magnum* were filmed on location in Hawai‘i, and edited in Hollywood; they have been much heralded for their logistical ingenuity and resulting realism. All three series of the first cycle were promoted and acknowledged for the authenticity and realism they brought to bear on dramatic television.

The success of the first cycle—including the studio realism of *HE*—is a tribute in part to the array of narrative traditions the three series tap into. A key strategy was to use indigenous discourse to authenticate the mythic environment of subtropical Hawai‘i. “Indigenous means peculiar to,” reads the *HE* production bible. “Peculiar to means you find it there and no place else.” *HE* and *The Alaskans* would establish ABC in 1959 as the U.S. network with the most far-flung diegetic expanse. ABC had bragging rights to an empire that stretched tele-visually from North of the tundra to the middle of the Pacific Ocean. It would also align ABC and Warner Bros. with the general U.S. project of “settling” Hawai‘i, and bringing it into the Union fold.

The universe of the first cycle is a world rich in history and conflict. All three series for instance are steeped in military and anthropological lore. Tracey Steele (Anthony Eisley) of *HE* and Steve McGarrett (Jack Lord) of *Five-0* are Korean War veterans, and Thomas Magnum (Tom Selleck) of *Magnum* and his buddies are veterans of Vietnam. Other *HE* characters include undersea frogman and demolition expert Thomas Lopaka (Robert Conrad, in brownface), Cricket Blake (Connie Stevens) whose Naval Commander father was killed during the Pearl Harbor surprise attack, and Kazuo Kim (Poncie Ponce), a member of the famed 442nd Infantry Regiment. Furthermore, references to Native Hawaiian issues are generally informed and ultimately substantiated by an amalgamation of legends and myths of Hawai‘i itself. Along with the narrative traditions that support these discursive locations, the cycle is influenced by Hollywood’s industrial, economic and political culture, and that of the federal government, local government and economy, and the specific traditions of the
many cultures that call Hawai‘i home.

Let me state that a central thread of my argument is that commercial culture in general, and TV narrative in particular as it is situated in the Hawai‘i paramilitary context, serves both historicizing and mythologizing functions. Its influence in other words is doubly effective. Episodic drama in the foundational decades of oligopoly TV tended to yield highly pedagogic and idealized content from a recognizable status quo. The ethnic mix of Hawai‘i and its contentious political past fueled an extreme level of self-consciousness in the production of the first cycle making it a perfect site to investigate how cultural producers of mass media mobilize myth and history to rewrite the present and the past, establish aesthetic and psychic boundaries, and provide rationales for idealized hierarchies, often making such entities appear naturalized and historically singular and inevitable.

The *HE* television series then marks the insertion of a potent line of discourse in and about Hawai‘i at a heavily marked moment in island history. This discourse is both a continuation of other generic discourses (travel, evangelical, tourist, political, legislative, economic, anthropological, archeological, ethnographic, cartographic, cartoon, military, for example) and a formal extension of Hollywood genres and style beyond continental boundaries.

**The Paramilitary Crucible**

Film and TV often personalize paramilitary conflict, boiling down social and geographic struggle to the *mano a mano* show down of kill or be killed. Such dramatic fare tends to be highly pedagogic and idealized in nature. In the foundational period of network TV, the audience learns the repercussions of deviance, as socially acceptable “types” win out in clear-cut battles of good versus evil.

Paramilitary TV allows for an exploration of law and order issues in a controlled environment, with a predictable level of resolution. Like the proto-hero Cook, Steele and Lopaka, McGarrett, Dano (James MacAuthor) and Magnum all carry pistols into battle, extend and consolidate the frontiers of far-flung empires, are the agents of secret missions and elite societies, represent and wield cutting-edge technology, function ideologically as Euro “gods” in Hawai‘i space, and inevitably resolve crises in a timely manner. The Hawai‘i TV hero has three additional functions, often explicitly stated, if not always implied, which relate to on-going nationalist issues. The Hawai‘i TV hero has a mission to prevent foreign infiltration, protect American lives and property, and promote a safe haven for tourist excursion and romance.

Tourism in the islands matured in the fifties, sixties and seventies. Noel Kent in his 1983 study notes that tourism quite literally took over the island economy after World War Two, eclipsing plantation agriculture. While the preoccupation with tourism is relatively recent, the proprietary desirability of Hawai‘i was framed as a mission of progress as early as 1837. “Annexation,” wrote the *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, a Honolulu business periodical, would mean “national prosperity instead of adversity. It means a glorious life of the people instead of gradual decay and death.” While Caucasian businessmen viewed annexation as a guaranteed
economic bonanza, the military saw it as essential foreign policy. Admiral DuPont, U.S. Navy, 1851:

It is impossible to estimate too highly the value and importance of the Hawaiian Islands... Should circumstances ever place them in our hands they would prove the most important acquisition connected with our commercial and naval supremacy in those seas.

In the 1860’s Secretary of State William Seward mapped out a plan, whereby Hawai`i, Midway, Samoa, the Philippines, Alaska and the Aleutians would function as stepping stones to the vast markets of Asia. An American supported coup usurped Hawaiian sovereignty in 1893. By 1898, the year of annexation, the first U.S. military camp, Camp McKinley, was established at the foot of Diamond Head Crater, and in 1908 the U.S. government began construction of a naval base at Pearl Harbor for the vaunted Pacifi c Fleet.

The proprietary relationship between the military and the broadcast industry during its incubatory radio and TV phases, as well as its government-enforced monopoly and oligopoly phases, directly affected how content was developed for the big three networks. In its vanguard position as a symbol of the Westward reach of the American Empire, the fi rst cycle was especially subject to pedagogic and political pressures. The space of Hawai`i became a space to make statements about such topics as U.S. race relations, the second world war, Japanese imperialism, the Korean war, Vietnam, psychological warfare, nuclear weapons, chemical weapons, the cold war, the vanishing Native, ecological terrorism, hippies, drugs, modern sex, women’s liberation, feminism, ageism, gangs, mobsters, labor relations, communism, multiculturalism, the new American male, democracy and the melting pot thesis. In the 570 episodes that make up the fi rst cycle, a new Hawai`i mythos would take shape less constrained by continental distance and oceanic space than it was by institutional expectations. The confirmation and seeming fi nality of Hawai`i statehood in 1959 opened the way for the mythology of the American nation and its own “peculiar” idiosyncrasies and iconographies to dominate narrative discourse about the region for the remainder of the 20th century.

Hollywood at War

To contextualize the rhetoric of the fi rst cycle and the aesthetic and corporate traditions and philosophies the series were influenced by, we must consider the culture and legacy of Hollywood’s nationalist efforts during World War Two. The narrative drive of shows like HE, Five-0 and Magnum resonate with the timbre of the war years films and postwar expectations. Hollywood studios set a precedent by voluntarily contributing to “the good war.” It was one of the few national industries that Franklin D. Roosevelt did not completely convert to the war effort. Instead, the titular heads of the movie studios were inducted into the military and told to carry on with filmmaking. David O. Selznick was commissioned as a Colonel, and Jack L. Warner was commissioned as a Lieutenant Colonel, one rank above his brother Major Abe Warner. Experiments in TV broadcasting were suspended during the war, thus while broadcasting executive Colonel David Sarnoff of NBC was attached to the Signal Corps and saw action oversees in Paris, and Colonel William S. Paley of CBS saw action with the Psychological Warfare Department, the movie moguls took responsibility for churning out propaganda in the form of informational shorts and patriotic war pictures.

Not only the heads of movie studios and broadcast networks, but other executives, actors, directors and cinematographers were assigned to propaganda units, or consigned by studios to work on war films. A quarter of the men at Warner Bros. studios joined the Armed Forces. Soon after the attack on Pearl Harbor, roughly one third of the pictures churned out by Hollywood depicted combat situations. As Michael Renov and Dana Polan have pointed out, “the war years can reveal...one of the intense examples of an attempt to make ideology into state ideology.” Much as TV became the great contextualizing mechanism...
in the colonial conflicts of the sixties and seventies, cinema in the forties was the medium more than any other that reflexively propagated, and thus exposed, state ideology. Here, where the boundaries between truth and the real, entertainment and propaganda, blur, the metaphysics and iconicity of nationalism were laid most bare.

During the Second World War most of the wartime combat dramas produced in Hollywood depict conflict in the Pacific arena. Though this was not exactly true of Warner Bros., the industry’s intense mapping and simulated militarization of the region inform the political and aesthetic dynamics of the films and TV shows that followed. In 1945, Harry Warner, then President of Warner Bros., made clear the studio’s post-war objectives when he said: “The essence of the task can be stated in a single phrase, ‘To interpret the American Way.’” The aestheticization of this “American Way” then becomes a mission in post-war Hollywood, a call to arms during the extension of the Cold War.

Warner Bros. television production was profoundly influenced by the experience and capabilities of studio feature film production. Sound stages, equipment, crew and established business practices ensured a smooth launch in 1954 into the new medium. While many early fictional TV programs were derivative of the skits and comedy of vaudeville, Warner Bros.’ heralded telpeels—Cheyenne, Sugarfoot, Bronco, Maverick, 77 Sunset Strip, Hawaiian Eye, Bourbon Street Beat, Surfside 6, Colt .45 and Lawman—initially drew most directly from established paramilitary genres such as the western, gangster and private eye for inspiration.

In an era of ideological uncertainty and economic prosperity, Warner Bros. TV in collaboration with the ABC network presented a violent and conservative depiction of frontier expansionism and urban authoritarian vigor. Like the phenomenon of television itself, Hawai‘i was perceived by the mainland as both an extension of the American frontier, and a developing space for cosmopolitan adventure. As such, it was a paradoxical site where agrarian myth and urban sprawl became televisually “fixed” by the pedagogic and propaganda techniques institutionalized by Hollywood during the war years. In this sense, the myth and conventions of the war film, private eye, gangster, and American western inform TV’s discursive incursion into Hawai‘i space. These conventions include the racialization of the “ideal” U.S. citizen as embodied later by the first cycle heroes, and the disappearance, marginalization or demonization of the ethnic and indigenous other.

The Televisual Amalgamation of Noir
During the Cold War era duplicitous incursions perceived and real seemed to beckon from every corner of the globe as anti-capitalist factions gained global space and ideological converts. More than ever the mapping of the world revealed the spread of Communism from Russia, to China, South East Asia, South and Central America, and interior, to the very foundations of American industry, politics and communications. It seemed America more than ever needed covert policing, both real and imagined, to retain and legitimate its colonial holdings, hierarchies and autonomy. In this atmosphere, TV happily reflected the ideal American Security State, where enlightened civilians work hand in hand with government institutions to protect domestic space and international interests.

If the TV Western sketched out the frontier heartland of domestic space and American ideology, the detective and police melodramas would protect and secure not only urban space and capitalist hierarchy, but international borders and democratic compliance as well. In this sense the 20th century paramilitary genres can be seen to work hand in hand televisually, checking domestic space from interior incursion while forestalling exterior intrusion by patrolling the fringes and outposts of American Empire.

By the late fifties the paramilitary television series had become the most popular form of fiction programming on television. Tales of urban violence, private eyes and federal agents, proliferated. Dragnet (1951-59) had
been a ratings winner since its debut. *Man Against Crime* (1949-54) with Ralph Bellamy and *Martin Kane, Private Eye* (1949-53) were even earlier examples of popular urban crime thrillers. The issues such shows addressed included traditional *noir* themes and aesthetics. International espionage seemed to threaten the moral, military and scientific fabric of the nation from every quarter. Murder, blackmail and sabotage were the means of counter-insurgence. The security state of the 1940's did not disappear in the fifties, but was transformed televisualy from the alleys and diners, motels and bus stops of hard-core *film noir*, to the lighter, more commercially salient environment of sparkling kitchens, family bathrooms and the luxury resort. *Noir* did not so much disappear however, in the TV incarnation, as undergo a transformation that repackaged it as an eminently consumable, and thus, recoupable product. *Noir* would pay, even on TV. But to achieve this sell on a weekly basis, to audience and merchants alike, it employed the framework of *noir* while divesting it of its ideological ambivalence and stylistic ambiguities. The intense stylization of German Expressionism that conveyed psychological angst and uncertainty in the twenties had by the late fifties become a highly stylized vehicle of realism, a mode that packaged connotations of a certain interior conflict no longer operative in the cathode world of television transmission. Like the para-military programs from the late forties and early fifties, the Warner Bros. cycle of private eye series as well quoted *noir* in its *mise-en-scéne*, hard-boiled lighting, nighttime denouements, use of the *femme fatale*, underlying emphasis on carnal sexuality, and in its privileging of cosmopolitan politics. But the threat was ultimately contained on television by its commercial framing and cyclical redundancies.

The self-awareness *HE* suggests by its parodic tone does not constitute the kind of social critique typically associated with political satire. Rather, *HE*, like *Magnum* some twenty years later, revels in its *ad hoc* mixture of high seriousness and lowbrow entertainment. Yet, whereas *Magnum* breaks the vaunted fourth wall of realism with direct-address glances, winks and raised eyebrows and often irony-laced, self-deprecating voiceover narration, *HE*, with its privileging of a cabaret musical number each episode by the voluptuous Cricket Blake (Connie Stevens) and the antics of local sidekick Kazuo Kim (Poncie Ponce), imbues the series with a light-hearted, carnivalesque atmosphere.
In this sense it fulfills a benchmark of Cawelti’s notion of generic change: it achieves humorous or burlesque transformation of the generic form. The mocking sneer of hard-core noir seems fluffed and gilded in this televisual metamorphosis. While the two primary heroes remain true to hard-boiled form, the sidekicks Connie Stevens and Poncie Ponce supply comic relief and spectacular entertainment. Cricket is nothing like the femme fatale of noir mythology, however, but neither is she entirely a goody two-shoes. Rather, she strikes a balance between a strictly conservative aesthetic, and that of the emerging culture of racial tolerance and brotherly love.

The légéreté of the TV incarnation is the polar extreme of the depression and ambiguity of noir. Cricket’s effusive state of prepubescent grace, for example, seems otherworldly next to the sordid sexuality embodied by fellow lounge singer Rita Hayworth more than a decade earlier in Gilda (1946), or the spiderwoman sensibility of Barbara Stanwyck’s Phyllis Dietrichson in Double Indemnity (1944). Cricket is certainly no spiderwoman. She chirps but she has no real bite.

Such televisual effervescence was not ubiquitous in popular American culture of the time. Generic articulations on the big screen could still deliver scathing and negative indictments of predatory capitalist ethics by using again the liminal position of law enforcement to explore social corruption.

Thus the légéreté found on network TV—wherein the status quo is vigorously recuperated no-matter how far-flung the narrative—finds its negative parallel in the highly cynical films of late fifties noir like Stanley Kubrick’s The Killing (1956) and Orson Welles’ Touch of Evil (1958). In these baroque examples of film noir, corrupt agents of law enforcement cross the line and never come back, never are recuperated by the status quo. A push and pull dialectic between film and TV becomes evident. The narrative convolutions and ambiguities of such films are ironed out on network television in terms of both the iterative treatment of themes and characters, and in the insistence on finality and clarity. If film noir of the forties and fifties exploited the lounge, the night club, the motel, the bus stop, the dark alley, the click of concrete on the metropolitan beat, as many suggest, HE in its luxury resort setting and with the titillating yet utterly wholesome Cricket Blake, takes its noir framing to the limits of parody. Such a framing jubilantly reaffirms the hegemonic power grids noirish films often seemed to question.

An Episodic Reading

“Maybe Menehunes” was one of the last shows aired in the final 1963 season of HE.11 By this time, the series had achieved a substantial level of redundancy as a system of discourse. The placement of “Menehunes” at the end of the series run suggests an effort to pedagogically and self-reflexively acknowledge and resolve differences and conflicts between Western and Hawaiian legal, moral and historical perspectives. Within the episode, binary positions are sketched out and strengths and weaknesses are assessed. The tiki serves as a center point for the cultural mediation enacted in the narrative. Throughout the episode tikis in various placements, framings, and compositions represent a whole range of dichotomies: past and present, primitive and civilized, legal and illegal, superstition and science, good and bad, intelligence and ignorance, triviality and nobility, and ultimately, right and wrong. The unctu-
ous parody of the double-tongued symbol slides between the enunciative poles of ancient tradition and newfound appropriation. Playing off the theme of detective-as-native, for instance, the tiki is ubiquitously paired in two-shots with lead detective Greg McKenzie (Grant Williams) during crucial confrontations with village natives and mainland haoles alike. Like the buttocks of another era, the tiki becomes a symbolic touchstone that the detectives must scientifically and emotionally master in order to lay to rest the demons and prejudices of contemporary ethnic, political and moral debates.

Despite the telltale two-shots of the investigator(s) in “Menehunes” and the symbolic alignment of the tiki with the HE agency during credit and interstitial sequences, the tiki in this episode ultimately comes to evoke the obsolescence of Native agency and superstition. Two discursive traditions on the Native pinion the dialectic at work here. On the one hand, the worship of idols and attendant “non-rational” thinking will be depicted as inferior to the secular skepticism of Western science, and the imperative of White romance; on the other hand, Hawaiian compassion, generosity and helpfulness is narrativized to be more “noble” than Western arrogance, indulgence, and selfishness. The Hawaiian is positioned to mitigate against such Western excess, teaching the Caucasian subject a certain humbleness, “natural” balance, and ultimately, peace of mind. The rational Western subject meanwhile teaches the Native empirical lessons in socio-political progress and non-mythological, objective reality. Empirical reality and its categorical certainty educates the Native, while the Native reaffirms these conditions (diegetically) through their humble acceptance of the series’ rhetorical polemics and dénouement.

The Hawaiian villagers in “Menehunes” believe their land is sacred, a gift from the god Kulono, and that Norma Marriot (Diane Foster), the aging Hollywood starlet who purchased the land upon which to build her dream retirement home, has no a priori claim to it, no matter what the system of law. They “cling to their old ways,” as HE investigator Greg McKenzie explains to his client, and are holding up construction by refusing to vacate a choice parcel of the property near the lily pond, around which their village has stood since time immemorial. In the village, a towering tiki of solid stone weighing “at least a thousand pounds” and named Malahealani is revered by the natives as a sacred relic. Erected in the center of the village, it is as well a flashpoint for their resistance to White law. It has exaggerated predatory teeth and teeters from side to side like a metronome when “upset” or communicating to the villagers.

Despite its high-seriousness, “Menehunes” did not lose sight of its consumer-driven context. The tiki is positioned in the narrative early on as a renowned tourist attraction. Kim takes two elderly visitors from the Midwest for a walking tour of the village, where they have him ask Akao (Joe DeSantis, in brown-face), the village chief, if they can touch the statue for good luck. The solemn nod of the village elder, and the enthusiasm of the gray-haired women hustling to rub the tiki, delivers on the promise of a Hawaiian style access to authenticity, before the episode becomes a contemporary social issues exposé, exploring the underbelly of the White versus Native dialectic.

In this narrative, legitimization through written law and the imperative of White romance supersede all claims to indigenous proprietorship. The crisis of marital romance drives the Hollywood starlet to insist on the authority of the law to uphold her fee simple claim and force the villagers from the land. As representatives of “American” jurisprudence, the HE team must insist on the letter of the law, even if they question the morality of the act. But above and beyond the call of duty, they are susceptible to the plight and delicacy of colonial coupling, and the nobility of its calling. On a summit overlooked by tikis, Norma professes to McKenzie that she needs the home to save her marriage. Finally McKenzie understands the true import of her mission and solemnly promises he will do all in his power to help her.
Ultimately, McKenzie and Barton (Troy Donahue) will reveal that the moving tiki is a hoax masterminded by Mali Kuno (Naomi Stevens, in brownface), an elderly Hawaiian woman who has allegedly attempted several times to kill the movie star in order to save the village. In this sense she is the pagan antithesis to the stereotypic overly generous Hawaiian who has an innate gift for “giving” everything away. Mali is a carnivalesque character, a tragic villain, a ventriloquist for Malahealani (just as Stevens, DeSantis, and Conrad in brownface are ventriloquists for American interests). She is the devouring vagina of Hawaiian lore, the orifice with teeth, the Kahun Aina Aina who prays her victims to death. Ultimately, in this representation, she embodies the reason for social conflict and political contestation.

Under cover of night, McKenzie and Barton sneak into the village to investigate Malahealani. The detectives believe, based on their knowledge of Egyptian lore, that the tiki moves on some hydraulic system and have dug up a cable leading to a hidden lever. But the village men capture McKenzie and Barton just as they uncover its mechanical secret. Mali appears and orders the Hawaiian men to do away with the detectives: “You must! Kulono says you must!” she shouts. But at the last minute, the young college-educated Leona (Ellen Davalos, in Polynesian guise) and the village chief Akao intervene. And here the fickleness of the gods and transience of historical precedent become tools of rhetoric. McKenzie tries to reason with the angry natives by disavowing their religion. “Don’t listen to her!” he calls out. “She’s just playing on your fears and superstitions. There is no Kulono. It’s just another legend!”

Mali: “Kulono has moved Malahealani to show you his will. He’ll destroy us all if you disobey him.”

“Wait!” calls Akao, stepping from his abode.

“Our gods have always done good. They showed our ancestors the way to steer their long boats. They pointed to this land. They showed our fathers where to build these homes. I’ve given this much thought. They would not bring all this trouble, all this violence down on us. Our gods moved Malahealani to signal us. Maybe we read their meanings wrong. Maybe they wish to tell us our time on this land is ended. I will listen. The house may be built here.”

Mali is dismayed and cries out: “No Akao, you can’t let them do it!”

Akao: “There will be no more violence! No
more blood will be shed here. Go.” At this pronouncement, the Hawaiian men disperse, and the land once so coveted is symbolically relinquished.

“Menehunes” aestheticizes the historical displacement of Hawaiians from Hawaiian land. It attempts to explain in its pseudo-historical, popular culture way, why rich developers or movie stars have come to develop and live on the prime real estate of the islands. That the audience recognizes it as a fictional narrative does not erase its pedagogical impetus, discursive influence, or its cultural impact, even if such residue is difficult to quantify.

The dénouement finds the investigators and movie star at the swank Dragon Nightclub with their respective entourages enjoying a meal. Mali has been sent away, presumably to prison. Norma’s taciturn husband (Andrew Duggan), who at one time had built his auto enterprise into “one of the biggest companies in the world,” now (re)asserts himself as family patriarch. He allows the Hawaiians to keep their “shrine” and orders the architects to build on another part of the land, so that both the new landowners and the Hawaiians can coexist in harmony. Akao as well put his foot down, halting the violence and leading his people to quiet compliance, an act positioned as a sign of pragmatism in light of Mali’s vengeance and duplicity. In this way the “problem” of Hawaiian landlessness and the issue of the American appropriation of a sovereign nation, are both feminized, implicitly exonerating Euro-American patriarchy of complicity, and rationalized as a legal and historic compromise, in which primitive rights and land are voluntarily ceded to Americanized interests.

Thus the fifty-minute episode wraps up neatly, and the supernaturally powerful of the tiki is revealed as a sham. The Hawaiians have come to acknowledge their place as wards of the new state. The excessively hysterical wife relinquishes her destructive role as head of the household. Furthermore, the new elite have tacitly demonstrated their capacity for understanding and compromise with this ancient race and culture. Superstition and myth are demonstrated to be inferior to secular rationale and a society of Western law. Finally, the American element is exonerated of any breach of ethics by their final, humanitarian gestures. In this episode, the Hawaiians are not so much displaced as reenshrined and repackaged for continental consumption. They are as well neutralized and televisually colonized for pedagogical review.

Conclusion

As a cycle, HE, Five-0 and Magnum present conventions and iconographies against which other media can be measured. In considering this initial broadcast arc, we can begin to chart a legacy of very powerful representations which have had and continue to have global impact in syndication, on the Internet, in academic discourse, and intertextually as new shows quote, parody and borrow in other ways from the regional mythologies of the past. This envisioning of Hawai`i is not random, nor is it purely entertainment; it is a deeply invested narrative system predicated on naturalizing and idealizing certain kinds of subject-object positions and political processes. The historical contestedness of island territory and the demographic and cultural mélange and specificity of Oceania in general make it an ideal site to consider how national media industries have deployed race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality and narrative techniques to rhetorically promote nation-ness.

In Hawai`i, intelligentsia and students of media and communications need to unpack the dense discursive traditions and assumptions that inform and naturalize both the first cycle and other film and television product in the region, for colonization is as much a psychological phenomenon, as it is territorial, political and aesthetic. Not only will the arts and academy be profoundly affected, but the region will gain a yardstick by which to measure and track the historical every-day and virtual socio-political transformations and transitions we so silently witness in local media (i.e., the local news), and in such nationally platformed TV shows as Jake and
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the Fatman, One West Waikiki, The Byrds of Paradise, Island Son, Marker, Crowfoot, Hawaiian Heat, Baywatch Hawaii, The Break,16 and in other softpower product like Big Jim McClain, Diamond Head, Blue Hawaii, The Hawaiians, Hawaii, North Shore, Pearl Harbor, Blue Crush and Lilo and Stitch. These Hollywood conceived programs tell us more about the desires and ideals of the people and institutions making the programs than they do about actual island living. It’s a fantasy and allegorical realm predicated on naturalizing continental hegemony and hierarchies, and rehearsing territorial containment and control.

NOTES

1 All Hawaiian Eye photos from the Warner Brothers Archives at the University of Southern California School of Cinema-Television.


3 Britos, Peter. “Double-Tongued Symbols”, 2003. “The Cook comparison is explicit in the first cycle with direct references to the naval heritage of Steele, Lopaka, McGarrett and Magnum, and in the narrative embodiment of Captain Cook by Lopaka in the Hawaiian Eye episode “Kakua Woman”, and in the mythologizing of the familial genealogy of Cook in Magnum P.I.’s premiere episode (“Don’t Eat the Snow in Hawaii”), wherein Lieutenant Dan Cook is Magnum’s best (and soon dead) friend, and Navy legend Rear Admiral Raleigh Cook, Dan’s (off-screen) father, is Magnum’s surrogate father.”

4 Hawaiian Eye Production Bible located in Warner Brothers Archives at USC Cinema-Television library.

5 Cook carried a double-barrel pistol on his failed and final mission to kidnap the ali`i nui Kalaniopu`u. One barrel was filled with shot, the other with ball.


7 Quoted in Merze, Tate. Hawaii: Reciprocity or Annexation. East Lansing, Michigan State University Press, 1968, (p. 4).


11 On the one hand, menehune are immortalized as magical and mischievous little people of Hawaiian legend, a figure akin to a sprite or leprechaun. Menehunes were said to have built whole mountain terraces overnight, as well as fishponds, roads and temples. On the other hand, menehune were theorized to be original people of the islands, perhaps from South America, who were enslaved, and/or colonized by the war-like immigrants of the South Pacific.

12 Grant Williams replaced Anthony Eisley as head P.I. of Hawaiin Eye by 1963.

13 Kulono is a conflation of the primary Hawai`i political gods, Ku and Lono.

14 Five years later in The Hawaiians, Stevens, a New York stage actress, would portray Queen Lili`uokalani (again in brownface) as a blood thirsty ruler intent on beheading Whip Hoxworth (Charlton Heston) for treason, the penultimate reason in this pseudo-history for the overthrow of Hawai`i.

15 As explored in the episode “The Kapua of Coconut Grove”. Here Mama Mahina, an elderly, childless woman is convinced by her former pupil, Lopaka (Robert Conrad), to donate her land gratis, for the benefit of future generations, to Kingsley, a wealthy land developer modeled after series sponsor and industrial tycoon Henry Kaiser.

16 The Break is a 2003 TV pilot from FOX and Imagine Entertainment. In this story, a 32-year old Caucasian who moved to the mainland as a teenager returns as a cop to Hawai`i with his troubled 14-year old son.