

Literatures in English: New Ethical, Cultural and Transnational Perspectives.
Ed. Michael Kenneally et al. Tübingen: Stauffenburg, 2013.

Literary Citizenship in the Writing of Oceania: The Example of John Kneubuhl and Albert Wendt

Otto Heim (*University of Hong Kong, China*)

In this paper, I am interested in the emergence and articulation of new visions and practices of citizenship as politicised ways of belonging in transnational and globalised contexts, in which the nation or nation state as empowering framework has come to be widely challenged. As I will try to show, the development of such visions and practices calls for an imaginative rethinking of national identity and as such has much to learn from postcolonial situations where the institutions of the Western-style nation state sit uncomfortably on top of (or alongside) social formations shaped by long histories of prior occupation and settlement. While such arrangements do not in themselves make for political innovation, they provide imaginative resources for writers whose lives and work challenge and mobilise national identification across and beyond state boundaries in ways that may equip them (and perhaps us) to return to the realm of the nation with an altered sense of political community.¹

I

New forms of citizenship are today more commonly associated with global or planetary consciousness than national imagination, with information technologies such as the internet and mobile phones than public broadcasting and national newspapers or literary traditions. Many critics of the political consequences of economic globalisation have indeed emphasised the diminished power of nation states to protect democratic processes and guarantee effective citizenship, as David Slater sums up:

First, given the rapid internationalization of economic and political relations, national governments have been required to reduce the scope and effectiveness of their economic policy. In turn, this reduced sovereignty places a limit on the range of decisions controlled by the democratic process, and erodes the substance of political participation at the national level. Second, the introduction of a highly technocratic policy style tends to undermine the democratic ethos of representative institutions, whilst market reforms are accompanied by a style of decision-making that corrodes accountability and transparency. Third, the so-called 'streamlining of the state,' which includes and is largely defined by severe and indiscriminate cuts in public expenditure, reduces the capacity of the state to guarantee the effective exercise of citizenship rights in the areas of security, health and education and income maintenance. Pushed to the extreme, drastic cut-backs in the social and economic capacity of the state threaten its very integrity.²

As a result, as Arif Dirlik notes, “nation-states [have] become more complicit in globalism and gradually abandon[ed] the task they had assumed earlier of mediating the global and the local.”³ Indeed, national sovereignty in this globalising context appears reduced to the ability (and the need) to compete over the economic benefits of globalisation, as Robert O. Keohane suggests:

Sovereignty no longer enables states to exert effective supremacy over what occurs within their territories: Decisions are made by firms on a global basis, and other states’ policies have major impacts within one’s own boundaries. Reversing this process would be catastrophic for investment, economic growth, and electoral success. What sovereignty does confer on states under conditions of complex interdependence is legal authority that can either be exercised to the detriment of other states’ interests or be bargained away in return for influence over others’ policies and therefore greater gains from exchange.⁴

Yet if under the supremacy of “market logics,”⁵ traditional forms of citizenship, “understood in terms of the rights and obligations available to individuals as members of a state, that is, as a national community of fate,”⁶ appear to have given way to a “market-based definition of citizenship [that] has transformed citizens into corporate subjects,”⁷ new forms or dimensions of citizenship have emerged in spaces that are themselves products of globalisation, where ‘communities of fate’ rally in opposition to dominant globalisation and the quest for alternatives. Janet Conway, for instance, identifies an empowering space of this kind in the World Social Forum,⁸ which calls for a shift of focus in the conception of citizenship:

from an exclusive focus on states to the organizations and processes of ‘civil society’; from citizenship understood solely or primarily in legal-institutional terms to citizenship understood as enacted through cultural practices, including those of the movements and groups of civil society; from an exclusive focus on the national scale to one attentive to multiple and overlapping scales as producing the conditions for effective citizenship, itself understood as operating at a variety of scales; from a preoccupation on welfare rights in welfare states to recognition of an array of new rights (to cultural difference, for example); and from rights understood exclusively in individual terms to collective claims [...].⁹

While suggesting that “a new paradigm of citizenship, both post-liberal and post-national, is in formation,”¹⁰ however, Conway recognises that its focus has so far been limited to opposition and protest, particularly in “the convergence of both anti-globalization and anti-war movements.”¹¹ If a “new democratic imaginary and, with it, a new paradigm of citizenship are taking shape,”¹² their shape is as yet inchoate and undefined, as her account of the 2004 gathering in Mumbai suggests:

Even without one-on-one communication or language translation, just being together in this one space constituted by opposition to neo-liberalism is powerful.

Physically encountering the throngs sharing the space of the WSF, listening to the drums, chants, and songs, absorbing the array of visual images, faces, costumes, bodies and banners are all instances of communicability imperfect, incomplete, and incommensurate, but powerful, even transformative, nonetheless.¹³

The internet may be a space in which such a new democratic imaginary is extended and articulates itself more definitely, with the figure of the netizen potentially embodying a political subject “beyond the citizen.”¹⁴ According to Mark Poster, the netizen may offer “a vehicle for thinking through and mobilizing a planetary democratic movement” in ways that traditional “principles such as the rights of man and the citizen” do not, because it is capable of “includ[ing] difference with universality” and can “take into account the cultural construction of the human-machine interface.”¹⁵ For Poster, “the netizen might be the formative figure in a new kind of political relation, one that shares allegiance to the nation with allegiance to the Internet and to the planetary political spaces it inaugurates.”¹⁶ Considering the realisation of this potential at the beginning of the twenty-first century, however, Poster too notes that “what is at issue [so far] is protest against modern institutions, the corporation and the state, not the development of new political bonds inscribed in the new human-machine interface.”¹⁷

The effectiveness of the political imaginaries taking shape in spaces like the WSF and the Internet depends on an articulation of the alliances and identifications they sustain with engagements in spaces that remain to a greater extent home to national imaginaries. As Arturo Escobar argues in his discussion of the role of information technology in the politics of the WSF:

this cybercultural politics can be most effective if it fulfils two conditions: awareness of the dominant worlds that are being created by the same technologies on which progressive networks rely; and an ongoing tacking back and forth between cyberpolitics and place-based politics, or political activism in the physical locations where networkers and netweavers sit and live.¹⁸

In these locations, the nation and the state indeed remain important frames of habit and aspiration, displaced but not replaced by transnational systems of communication and dominance. One effect of this displacement may precisely be, as Kwame Anthony Appiah suggests, the need “to insist on the distinction between state and nation.”¹⁹ Against the view that national boundaries, being morally arbitrary, should not define our notions of citizenship, Appiah maintains that both the nation and the state continue to matter, albeit for different reasons, and that “if anything is morally arbitrary, it is not the state but the nation.”²⁰

Because human beings live in political orders narrower than the species, and because it is within those political orders that questions of public right and wrong

are largely argued out and decided, the fact of my being a fellow citizen of yours – someone who is a member of the same order – is not morally arbitrary at all. [...] The nation, on the other hand, *is* arbitrary, but not in the sense that means we can discard it in our moral reflections. It is arbitrary in the root sense of that term, because it is, in the *Oxford English Dictionary*'s lapidary formulation, 'dependent upon will or pleasure.'²¹

As imagined communities, nations tend to "matter more to people than do states" precisely because "they matter *to people*. [...] States, on the other hand, matter morally intrinsically."²² If, as Appiah contends, "the yoking of nation-state in the Enlightenment was intended to bring the arbitrary boundaries of states into conformity with the 'natural' boundaries of nations,"²³ recognising the nation as an imaginative frame distinct from the state makes it possible to re-imagine their articulation in ways that reorient action and decision within the institutional context of the state. For Appiah, it is therefore not a question of abandoning the nation or the state in favour of some larger notion of common identity, but rather of accessing them as "resources available for self-creation"²⁴ in ways that need not assume a common identity or culture.

Such a view of the nation as susceptible to critical re-imagination is shared by Donna Palmateer Pennee, who (quoting Stuart Hall) argues that although

the nation is 'no longer serviceable' in its 'originary and unreconstructed form,' [...] it is necessary to go on thinking with the nation, seeking legal recourse through the nation, doing business through (though not for) the nation, and performing cultural critique with the nation in its 'detotalized or deconstructed' but nevertheless still operative 'forms'.²⁵

For Pennee too, therefore, "[f]or the time being, there is no question of doing without the national; it is rather a matter of doing the national differently."²⁶ Such rethinking or reimagining of the national extends to and benefits from a reconsideration of the relationship between literature and the nation, recognising literature as a source of national imagination that is not confined to an expression of shared cultural or ethnic identity. Considering the case of Canadian literature as postcolonial literature, Pennee suggests, it is useful

to keep on the table for discussion how the *literary* and the *national* remain categories and modes of productivity and reproductivity [...] sites for arguing that culture represents not only the bounds and parameters of identity but also the less bounded but equally crucial processes of identification.²⁷

Following Pennee, we can speak of literary citizenship as such an identification sustained by a critical engagement with the national in the institutional spaces of reading and writing. Literature in this view mediates the relationship between nation and state in the formation of critical subject positions or attitudes, capable of questioning the foundations of community

and imagining effective ways of living and working together in globalised national contexts.

II

These observations on literary citizenship seem to have particular relevance to Oceania, where the transplantation of western political institutions has often resulted in division and disempowerment and where the economic and ecological impacts of global interconnectedness are perhaps felt more urgently than elsewhere. As Terence Wesley-Smith points out in a recent article considering decolonisation in Oceania, not only has the internationally recognised principle of self-determination been unevenly applied, reflecting continuing colonial interests in the region, but where political independence has been achieved, it has largely relied on “alien institutions, notably the western-style nation state.”²⁸ He highlights the high financial and social costs of establishing and maintaining national sovereignty within the boundaries of former colonies that “were established with scant regard for the traditional cultural and political features of Oceania”²⁹ and the damage done to local communities and ecosystems by efforts to make these political entities economically viable. In view of these challenges, Wesley-Smith calls for a strengthening of existing institutions that is consistent with indigenous practices and forms that have proved sustainable, and he points out that the main difficulty in this regard is not the design of institutions or even the availability of resources but “to change the wider political culture in which western-style state institutions must operate over the longer term.”³⁰

Inasmuch as this challenge has been taken up by writers who explore the possibilities for innovation inherent, for instance, in the incongruities between the space of the nation and the space of the state, Oceania in turn also seems to be of particular relevance to such institutional rethinking and reimagining elsewhere. Perhaps the most influential effort at such a reconceptualisation of the political spaces of the region has been Epeli Hau‘ofa’s vision of Oceania as a “sea of islands,”³¹ emphasising the connecting marine environment and long histories of mobility and settlement as common heritage and resource of Pacific Island societies. In a series of essays, included in the aptly titled collection, *We Are the Ocean*, Hau‘ofa proposes the ocean itself as a metaphor shaping and mobilising cultural and political identifications within and across national boundaries in the region. Building on the recognition of the oceanic environment as the foundation of the atmosphere sustaining all terrestrial life, Hau‘ofa’s vision of an oceanic identity is broadly inclusive, admitting “anyone who has lived in our region and is committed to Oceania [as] an Oceanian.”³² At the same time, he makes it clear that he is “not in any way suggesting cultural homogeneity for [his] region” but considers the regional identity designated by the ocean as “something additional to the other identities we

already have.”³³ He thus draws attention to the way recognition of a multiplicity of identities requires us to rethink the political affiliations that define citizenship, noting that many “people with origins in Oceania [...] are citizens of [countries outside the region] who consider themselves Pacific Islanders,”³⁴ just as the region of Oceania itself is composed of many nationalities, and people in many islands have national affiliations both within and outside the region:

Cook Islanders are citizens of their own country and simultaneously of New Zealand. French Polynesians and New Caledonians are French citizens; Guamanians are American citizens; American Samoans have one leg in the United States and the other in Eastern Samoa.³⁵

This is not to say that this diversity of affiliations naturally constitutes harmonious and open societies, or indeed that the metaphor of the ocean as a rallying symbol is immune to exclusionary and nationalist interpretations.³⁶ The innovative and transformative potential of Hau‘ofa’s vision of Oceania depends on its concretisation within and across the diversely constituted national boundaries in the region, where it may orient action toward openness and connection, mobilise negotiation of difference and broaden notions of identity. Probably the best-known example of such concretisation is the widespread use of the space-building metaphor of the ocean-going “canoe” among Pacific Island societies, projecting Oceania as a dynamic space of moving islands.³⁷ Here I would like to take another approach and suggest how an Oceanic reorientation of national identity and citizenship is concretised in the examples offered by the lives and work of two writers from a particular island country, Samoa.³⁸

The example of Samoa is particularly interesting because its far-flung population, stretching across multiple national boundaries, makes it a virtual paradigm for global citizenship. Together with Fiji and Tonga, Samoa forms a part of the Polynesian triangle from which Polynesian culture began to spread across the Pacific some three thousand years ago. Although never formally unified in a nation state, the Samoan islands have for many centuries constituted a common cultural and political space. As Penelope Schoeffel points out, “the international border between western and eastern Samoa is a colonial artifact drawn in 1900, and most Samoan extended families (*aiga*) have branches on both sides of it.”³⁹ The Western part of the archipelago was a German colony until the First World War, after which it came under New Zealand administration, first as a League of Nations mandate and after 1946 under a United Nations trusteeship agreement. In 1962, Western Samoa gained full independence and almost immediately signed a Treaty of Friendship with New Zealand, which, among other things, has resulted in a steady flow of Samoans to New Zealand ever since, where, according to Schoeffel, by 1994 Samoans were the “third largest ethnic group after the Anglo-Irish and the

Maori.”⁴⁰ The smaller eastern part of the archipelago meanwhile remains an unorganised and unincorporated territory of the United States and “American Samoans [are] US nationals, but not citizens.”⁴¹ In terms of political organisation, both independent Samoa and American Samoa have long combined Western forms of government with traditional Samoan features, especially the *matai* system of representation, and largely retain communal ownership of land by traditional kin groups.⁴² Their colonial affiliations have made the Samoans one of the most mobile populations in the world and, according to Ron Crocombe, “three times as many American Samoans live in the USA as in American Samoa [and] more Samoans live in New Zealand, Australia, USA and beyond than at home.”⁴³ Since wages are higher in American Samoa, a large proportion of the population of the US territory are in fact immigrants from Western Samoa. According to Cluny Macpherson, this postcolonial history of migration has resulted in the “transnationalization of Samoan society”⁴⁴ with its centre in the islands and nodes along the Pacific Rim and “strong linkages” between them. Macpherson points out that while up until the 1980s the Samoan centre tended to dominate the cultural life in the Samoan diaspora, as the foreign-born proportion among the Samoan population overseas became the majority in the 1990s, “the nodes have become the centers and [...] the standards of the enclaves have become those to which those in the homeland aspire.”⁴⁵

The careers of Samoan writers have inevitably been shaped by these transnational histories and connections and as their work critically and creatively appropriates and reshapes these conditions, it shows how literature can bring forth and sustain identifications that challenge and expand conventional notions of citizenship. In the remainder of this paper, I will try to substantiate this claim by considering the examples offered by the two most famous Samoan writers, Albert Wendt and John Kneubuhl. Both writers’ careers were launched within colonial formations and they found their vocations in conditions that they would come to distance themselves from, if not altogether abandon, at the height of their success. But while openly criticising conventional notions of good citizenship, their work at the same time elaborates an alternative vision of an Oceanic, if not global, citizenship by consciously drawing on Samoan traditions and concepts.

III

The parallels reveal a familiar pattern. Born in Western Samoa in 1939, Albert Wendt went to secondary school in New Zealand on a government scholarship when he was thirteen and stayed in the country until he graduated with an MA in History from Victoria University in Wellington in 1964. In 1965, he returned to Samoa and started teaching at Samoa College, where he became Principal in 1969. From 1975 to 1987 he worked at the University of the South

Pacific (mostly in Suva, Fiji) where, by 1982, he occupied the Chair of Pacific Literature and eventually became Pro-Vice-Chancellor. In 1988, he returned to New Zealand and became the first Polynesian to take up the Chair of New Zealand and Pacific Literature at the University of Auckland.⁴⁶ From 2004 to 2008 he was Distinguished Visiting Writer and held the Citizens' Chair in English at the University of Hawai'i at Manoa. Since 1973, he has published seven novels, four volumes of poetry and three collections of short stories, as well as a play. He has also been a mentor to many writers in Oceania and edited numerous anthologies of Pacific writing.

Almost twenty years Wendt's senior, John Kneubuhl was born in American Samoa in 1920 and he too was sent abroad to attend secondary school in Hawai'i, from where he went on to Yale University in 1938, where his talent for theatre was discovered and he studied under Thornton Wilder during his senior year. After graduating and serving in the Second World War, he returned to Honolulu in 1946, where he became associate director at the Honolulu Community Theatre and won acclaim both for his own plays and for his adaptations of Broadway plays. His plays were considered revolutionary for their time, especially in their focus on Hawaiian themes and in their use of Hawaiian Pidgin, which had never before been heard on the Hawaiian stage. In 1950 he wrote and directed the movie *Damien* and soon later left Honolulu for Hollywood where he spent the next eighteen years as a highly successful screenwriter, writing episodes for many popular series of the fifties and sixties, including *Adventures in Paradise*, *Hawaii Five-O*, *Star Trek*, and *The Wild, Wild West*. In 1968, he left Hollywood abruptly and returned to Samoa and for the rest of his life devoted himself to the study of Samoan and Polynesian culture and traditions, teaching in Tonga, Hawaii and American Samoa, where he "created and directed the bilingual/bicultural program for the American Samoan Department of Education."⁴⁷ During these years, he also wrote the only three plays ever to be published, although his collection, *Think of a Garden and Other Plays* only appeared five years after he died in 1992.

Kneubuhl's career seems energised by tension and contradiction, demonstrated most dramatically when he "gathered nearly twenty years worth of screenplays and burned them in a backyard fire" before he left Hollywood.⁴⁸ Yet a sense of alienation not only seemed to characterise his attitude toward his success as a screenwriter but his vocation as a writer more profoundly. Thus his earlier departure from Honolulu at the very moment when his success there seemed assured and he himself exalted the prospects of a Hawaiian theatre of world-class standard, suggests that his own creativity depended on a certain sense of evanescence, and indeed of loss, which also seems to account for his lack of interest in publishing his plays.⁴⁹ In his later plays, he came to focus most explicitly on a sense of loss, and what is most remarkable about the three plays collected in *Think of a Garden and other Plays* is their affirmation of Samoan and more broadly Polynesian culture and tradition as expressing a commitment to, and even celebration of, living with loss.

In each play, loss is mediated through the figure of the author, present on stage as a narrator/chorus in *Think of a Garden* and *Mele Kanikau* and as the absent playwright in the preoccupations of the actors in *A Play: A Play*. In different ways, the three plays stage a memory work, with *Think of a Garden* the most autobiographical, set in Samoa around Christmas 1929, focusing on the writer's family as it confronts its Samoan identity in the experience of loss: the mother's loss of her aristocratic connections to the village in which the family used to command respect and pride; the assassination of Tamasese, the leader of the Mau independence movement in Western Samoa; the writer as a child in his confrontation of loss in the shape of a dead child's ghost whom he must leave behind as the family separates and he departs for school in New Zealand; and the writer's own loss of his childhood. The audience shares in the experience of loss via the figure of the author, who observes the events on stage, which can at the same time be recognised as the work of his memory. A "relentlessly sad play," according to Kneubuhl,⁵⁰ *Think of a Garden* emphasises the connection to the dead as the source of identity and orientation toward community, in the writer's poignant parting words, allegorically weaving together the various strands of the play's plot:

WRITER: Now, years later, remembering that evening, I keep repeating my goodbyes to that little boy and to his garden... "Never be far from me, little one. Lodge yourself in me, somewhere in the words I will seek all my life, and there, cry out your hurt, cry until the words become a brown and shining young man raising his hands high and calling above the clamoring pain around us, 'Peace! Peace!' and only the blessed silence answers, that bright silence beyond which new mornings dawn for all of us. Go, Precious, go. Stay with me always."⁵¹

A tone of sadness is also evoked in the title of the second play in Kneubuhl's trilogy, *Mele Kanikau*, which designates it as a lament,⁵² but here it is accentuated by the satire of the *fale aitu*, traditional Samoan comic theatre in which the audience is confronted with a temporary loss of self and the dissolution of reality. As a result, the play has a more public and confrontational orientation than *Think of a Garden*. In an interview with Vilsoni Hereniko, John Kneubuhl emphasises the importance of the *fale aitu* (which can be translated as 'spirit house') to Samoan culture and to his own concept of theatre. According to Kneubuhl, the *fale aitu* was traditionally associated with communal rituals such as sexually focused "teasing nights," characterised by increasing abandonment and exposure and culminating in the panic-induced arrival of a ghost that sends the community scattering and reconstituting itself.⁵³ In the *fale aitu* sketch, this experience is mediated by the figure of a clown who leads the members of the audience in a release from social tensions and an experience of community by laughing at themselves.

In *Mele Kanikau*, a play around the rehearsal of a pageant in Honolulu, Kneubuhl uses the conventions of the *fale aitu* in order to link the

confrontation of loss explicitly with cultural identity, when Noa, a reclusive hula teacher, who is brought in to lead the rehearsal on the advice of his old friend, Carl, shocks the cast and puts Carl off by telling him that he is not a Hawaiian because he doesn't know what he has lost.⁵⁴ By the end of the play, Carl, the good citizen, "Treasurer, Hawaiian People's Association... Vice-President, the Hawaiian Foundation... President, the Society of Ali'i... Chairman, the Jubilee Festival Week... and so much more,"⁵⁵ gives up his part in the pageant, declaring "My dead are all around me now. There is no hiding from them. I know my loss now."⁵⁶ The play's story of love, betrayal and revenge again weaves together multiple layers, including the author, who appears as a commentator on stage and acknowledges that the play is inspired by a story he witnessed as a child in Samoa. His play itself consists of two layers, including the story of the pageant and the events at its rehearsal, where Noa offends everyone by getting drunk, confronting Carl and openly criticising the players for the artificiality of their idealising representation of Hawaiian royalty. He counters this by bringing representations of Hawaiian outcasts on stage and by asking his own dancers to perform the story in a way in which the distinction between performance and reality dissolves and Noa temporarily appears possessed by a spirit. It is only after Noa and his entourage are driven off the stage and have left, that news reaches the group rehearsing the pageant that Noa and his group of dancers all died in a traffic accident on the way to the rehearsal. While most of the members of the cast dismiss this as a bad joke, Carl believes and therefore leaves the pageant.

Like *Mele Kanikau*, *A Play: A Play*, the last play in Kneubuhl's trilogy, while set in Hawai'i, draws on the conventions of the Samoan *fale aitu*, indeed even more self-consciously so, in presenting the story of a group of actors rehearsing a play whose dynamic form is itself based on the *fale aitu*. Kneubuhl flaunts his iconoclastic vision by bringing the revered volcano goddess Pele on stage in various guises, as mischievous old woman, sexy young girl and strong Hawaiian man, to seduce each of the play's characters. In the course of the rehearsal, the distinction between the actors' rehearsal and the action of the play disappears, as they all confront the truth of their Hawaiianess and each of them realises that they have no existence apart from their role in the play, which itself appears on the page of their script even as they rehearse it. Like the main character in their play, who after learning that "you can only define a Hawaiian today by what he has lost"⁵⁷ returns home and rejoins his people to play his part, the players, dispossessed of their essence, decide to continue to rehearse their play. In so doing, their action also becomes a metaphor for the memory work of the author, who creates his art not from a rich cultural inheritance but from a confrontation of the evanescence of the past and of his identity as a figment of the imagination of others.

A sense of loss thus connects the three plays, but what is most interesting is the way this sense of loss is reworked in the sequence in which they have been

arranged, which is not the order in which they were written.⁵⁸ In *Think of a Garden*, the experience of loss is traumatic, in *Mele Kanikau*, it is revelatory or epiphanic, and in *A Play: A Play* it is finally shared and informs a conscious choice. Ostensibly, the sequence leads away from Samoa, with *Mele Kanikau* linking Samoa and Hawai'i and *A Play: A Play* Hawai'i and the world. But as Caroline Sinavaiana has suggested, it is *A Play: A Play*, rather than *Think of a Garden*, that may be considered the most Samoan of the three plays in that its form and vision are most strongly shaped by Samoan tradition, specifically the conventions of the *fale aitu*, even though its story is set elsewhere.⁵⁹ The sequence of the three plays and its orientation thus lead from a diasporic vision of a lost Samoan home to a Samoan vision of a transnational home.

A sense of loss as a binding experience and the importance of memory work have long been central to Albert Wendt's writing too, as evidenced by the title poem of his early collection of poetry, *Inside Us the Dead*, first published in 1976.⁶⁰ And although his career does not show the drastic about-turns of John Kneubuhl, the motivation for his writing too can be characterised as the intellectual's contradictory attitude toward the institutions to which he is professionally tied. While he does not hesitate to call himself a "Samoan writer,"⁶¹ Wendt's early novels and short stories, like *Pouliuli*, "Flying-Fox in a Freedom Tree," and *Leaves of the Banyan Tree*, were marked by a harshly satirical view of Samoan institutions, governance and corruption and an existentially tinged representation of Samoan life. For a discussion of literary citizenship of greatest interest is his writing after his return to New Zealand in 1987 to take up the Chair in New Zealand and Pacific literature at Auckland University. In the essay, "Pacific Maps and Fictions: A Personal Journey," based on his inaugural lecture, he admits his reluctance to give the lecture, partly due to "reading, with growing anger, the pontifications of elderly white Old Victorian Rambos who, for too long, have styled themselves the infallible guardians of a New Zealand historical/literary canon and honesty."⁶² In this lecture, Wendt acknowledged his genealogical ties to family and to Pacific traditions of story-telling inseparable from kinship affiliations, pointing out that "throughout the Pacific, these early maps and fiction, in the treasure-house of oral traditions, were the ones almost 200 years of colonialism has altered, erased, replaced, threatened."⁶³ He identifies and analyses the various maps and fictions that have superseded the indigenous ones and shaped his formation as a writer: from missionaries' teaching, Eurocentric education, anthropology, movies, to a New Zealand literature that failed to acknowledge the presence and precedence of the Maori. He thus recognises "a sense of loss [...] as a major concern in Pacific literature."⁶⁴ Asking "how [we can] decolonize ourselves of historical/cultural maps and fictions that exalt our position as 'civilizers' and relegate others to positions of inferiority,"⁶⁵ he declares "the act of writing [...] sedition,"⁶⁶ inasmuch as it seeks to redress the injustices of history.

Wendt's novel, *Black Rainbow*, published in 1992, enacts the argument of his inaugural lecture and in so doing questions the value of citizenship in the neoliberal state and projects the possibility of an alternative vision of national identification, based on a shared sense of loss and a commitment to justice. Described by Wendt as an "allegorical thriller,"⁶⁷ *Black Rainbow* recalls Huxley, Orwell and Kafka as it presents a dystopian view of New Zealand in the early 1990s as a neoliberal state, re-educating its citizens into oblivious and unquestioning consumers by feeding them ready-made myths and fantasies. Central to the government's control of its citizens is the powerful Tribunal, which in endless sessions of confession extracts people's histories and memories and orders their "reordinarination" as docile consumers. Wendt's representation of the Tribunal recalls the New Zealand government's attempt in the early 1990s to co-opt the Waitangi Tribunal and its investment in historical research in order to buy itself out of its obligations to Maori under the Treaty of Waitangi, with the effect, as Elizabeth DeLoughrey notes in her discussion of the novel, that "[h]istoriography became a lucrative business and an expanded domain of the state."⁶⁸

Black Rainbow self-consciously mimics the plot of thrillers where an ordinary citizen unexpectedly finds himself in the role of a super-hero government agent. Early in the novel, the narrator-protagonist, Eric Mailei Foster, a bank clerk, is released by the Tribunal and declared a Free Citizen, given a Final Reference that will allow him to get, without payment, whatever he desires. He is then sent on a quest to find his family, who has disappeared but is supposedly kept safe by the government in a place called the Puzzle Palace. As he proceeds, following clues provided by the government, his quest leads him into encounters with people and places named after characters in New Zealand fiction and into scenarios reminiscent of movies like *Total Recall* and *Blade Runner*, and it becomes increasingly clear that he is playing a part scripted in the government's televised Game of Life, as the hero who effortlessly gets everything he wants while pursuing an impossible mission. His role as Free Citizen seems designed to solicit the vicarious identification of a community of consumers whose desires the government constantly nourishes by feeding them fantasies of gratification.⁶⁹ Eventually, the hero decides to turn the tables with the help of three Polynesian street kids. They are the "Tangata Moni, the True People," merging, like their name, rebel Maori and urbanised Polynesians from the Islands, as well as like-minded white people, who resisted the government's attempts at reordinarination.⁷⁰ They inhabit the city's underground and lead the protagonist to their safe house which is stacked with books from the Maori Renaissance, by writers like Witi Ihimaera, Patricia Grace, Keri Hulme, as well as other indigenous writers, including Wendt himself.

The identification of Maori and Pacific Island literature as resource of resistance against "reordinarination" is emblematic of both the protagonist's resistance to the government's plans and Wendt's plotting of the reader's role

in *Black Rainbow*. With the help of the Tangata Moni, who tell him their stories, the protagonist succeeds in reading the Puzzle Palace against the grain and thereby manages to find his family. Yet the fulfilment of his quest proves disappointing when he discovers that his wife has become a victim of the government's brainwashing. At this point, he is forced to abandon his mission altogether and instead embarks on a quest in pursuit of what he knows he has irretrievably lost. Reminding himself that "we are what we remember,"⁷¹ he decides to track down and recollect as much of his past and history as he can. Yet the more he remembers of his true family, the more he comes to understand that, as if quoting Kneubuhl, "I had become the sum total of what I had lost. That loss defined me."⁷² Learning that he has repeatedly been reordinarised with different identities, only to revert back each time, he realises that his true self and his future lie in the blanks in the histories that the government has recorded.⁷³ Eventually, after killing the president, he confronts the Tribunal once more and is offered three options: another reordination into "a useful and productive citizen," temporary death followed by reincarnation "as a citizen of [his] choice," or "permanent death."⁷⁴ He chooses permanent death, but the story ends with a series of possible endings/beginnings, most of which disregard his choice and return him instead to one of his previous roles in the Game of Life. The novel's ending is thus self-consciously frustrating, for just as the hero's frustration of the expectations of his fictional audience redirects their interest toward his redefined quest, Wendt goads his readers into a pursuit of meaning whose frustration eventually proves more rewarding than its fulfilment. Indeed the very satisfaction of the quest for meaning, embedded in the text's densely allegorical structure, turns out to be designed to prepare us for the eventual confrontation of the dissolution of meaning as given.⁷⁵ In a move that recalls Kneubuhl's *A Play: A Play*, where the audience is left at the end with the prospect of the actors forever rehearsing a play from which they cannot escape, Wendt's novel too translates the experience of loss into that of its readers contemplating the disappearance of meaning and the responsibility that consequently falls on them as they "are free to improvise whatever other endings/beginnings they prefer."⁷⁶

IV

It is, ultimately, by allowing their audience to share the sense of loss embodied in their work and to contemplate the significance of choice in a play or game that is inescapable, that Kneubuhl and Wendt evoke the possibility of doing the national differently. While exposing the dispossession caused by histories of colonial nation building, they affirm the resilience of Samoan (and Polynesian) culture by identifying memory and an acknowledgment of loss as the source of distinctive traditions of story-telling and theatre capable of guiding action in

the contemporary world deprived of enduring identities. As Wendt notes in his introduction to *Lali: A Pacific Anthology*,

Colonialism, by shattering the world of the traditional artist, broke open the way for a new type of artist – an artist [...] who casts himself adrift in the Void and plots his own course by discovering and developing his own visions, voice, and style.⁷⁷

Yet in doing so, as Wendt also suggests, postcolonial writers keep drawing on the storehouse of Oceanic oral traditions:

Story-telling, oratory, and poetry, developed over hundreds of years, are highly developed and valued skills, which are now finding new expression in a written literature. Much of the new literature derives its power – often simply and directly – from the use of these ancient oral techniques. Most writers have not done this deliberately but, because nearly all of them have grown up immersed in the everyday richness of their own cultures' oral traditions, they have unconsciously transferred those traditions and techniques into what they have written.⁷⁸

Wilson Harris conceives of such writing, which emerges from a repository of silenced voices, as an “infinite rehearsal,” which, by paying close attention to “clues which lodge themselves in the draft [as if] planted by another hand,” discovers “that the substance of tradition, which we apparently have forgotten, begins to re-enact itself, to come through the imaginative tradition.”⁷⁹ By placing the confrontation of loss at the heart of their work, Wendt and Kneubuhl do not so much evoke nostalgia “for a tradition [and community] which one has apparently lost,”⁸⁰ as remind their audience of the experience of loss as the very foundation of community. In doing so, they also demonstrate the possibility to re-imagine a national identification and sense of community in ways that are based on a shared sense of loss and a concomitant commitment to reach out to others, rather than on ethnic identity or territorial claims.

If the nation, as Ernest Renan said in 1882, is “a soul, a spiritual principle” that is not defined by race, language, religion, material interest or geography but nevertheless binds people as a “spiritual family,”⁸¹ then this bond, which Renan identified as the acknowledgement of a shared debt to the past and a common wish to bequeath the same to the future, can, as Kneubuhl's and Wendt's examples suggest, be recognised as the willingness to remember what has been lost. For, as Renan also knew, “the essence of a nation is that all individuals have many things in common, and also that they have forgotten many things.”⁸² Kneubuhl and Wendt remind us that what we have in common as individuals is the reality of loss, the finitude of our very existence, which we are likely to forget even as it drives us together. Such a vision of community seems particularly relevant to the exposed island worlds of Oceania, where

survival depends on connectedness across distance. Yet in a different way, it seems equally relevant to our living together in globalised national contexts, which calls for an expansion of the political space of citizenship that acknowledges the multiplicity and non-identity of its constitutive aspirations.⁸³

NOTES

- 1 Research for this essay has been supported by a grant from the General Research Fund (HKU 744309H), administered by the Research Grants Council of the Hong Kong SAR.
- 2 David Slater, "The Spatialities of Democratization in Global Times," *Development* 41.2 (1998): 22-29, 23.
- 3 Arif Dirlik, "Place-Based Imagination: Globalism and the Politics of Place," *Place and Politics in an Age of Globalization*, eds. Roxann Prazniak and Arif Dirlik (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001) 15-51, 34.
- 4 Robert O. Keohane, "Sovereignty in International Society," *The Global Transformations Reader: An Introduction to the Globalization Debate*, eds. David Held and Anthony McGrew (Cambridge: Polity, 2000) 109-123, 117.
- 5 Janine Brodie, "Introduction: Globalization and Citizenship Beyond the National State," *Citizenship Studies* 8.4 (Dec. 2004): 323-332, 326.
- 6 Brodie, "Introduction," 324.
- 7 Brodie, "Introduction," 328.
- 8 First held in Porto Alegre, Brazil, in 2001, the World Social Forum is an annual gathering of grassroots movements and NGOs from around the world in opposition to the meeting of the world's economic and political leaders at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland. Usually held around the same time as the Davos meeting, the WSF, based in Brazil, emphasises the perspective of the global South, with meetings also held in India (2004), Kenya (2007) and Senegal (2011). See the forum's website at http://www.forumsocialmundial.org.br/main.php?id_menu=19&cd_language=2.
- 9 Janet Conway, "Citizenship in a Time of Empire: The World Social Forum as a New Public Space," *Citizenship Studies* 8.4 (Dec. 2004): 367-381, 369-70.
- 10 Conway, "Citizenship in a Time of Empire," 370.
- 11 Conway, "Citizenship in a Time of Empire," 378.
- 12 Conway, "Citizenship in a Time of Empire," 379.
- 13 Conway, "Citizenship in a Time of Empire," 377.
- 14 Mark Poster, "Digital Networks and Citizenship," *PMLA* 117.1 (Jan. 2002): 98-103, 99.
- 15 Poster, "Digital Networks and Citizenship," 99.

- 16 Poster, "Digital Networks and Citizenship," 101.
- 17 Poster, "Digital Networks and Citizenship," 102.
- 18 Arturo Escobar, "Other Worlds Are (Already) Possible: Self-Organisation, Complexity, and Post-Capitalist Cultures," *World Social Forum: Challenging Empires*, rev. ed., eds. Jai Sen and Peter Waterman (Montreal: Black Rose, 2009) 393-404, 402.
- 19 Kwame Anthony Appiah, "Cosmopolitan Patriots," *Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling Beyond the Nation*, eds. Pheng Cheah and Bruce Robbins (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1998) 91-114, 96.
- 20 Appiah, "Cosmopolitan Patriots," 96.
- 21 Appiah, "Cosmopolitan Patriots," 96.
- 22 Appiah, "Cosmopolitan Patriots," 96-97.
- 23 Appiah, "Cosmopolitan Patriots," 96.
- 24 Appiah, "Cosmopolitan Patriots," 98.
- 25 Donna Palmateer Pennee, "Literary Citizenship: Culture (Un)Bounded, Culture (Re)Distributed," *Home-Work: Postcolonialism, Pedagogy & Canadian Literature*, ed. Cynthia Sugars (Ottawa: U of Ottawa P, 2004) 75-85, 78. Arif Dirlik draws a similar conclusion from his critique of nation states' complicity in globalism: "This is not to say that the nation-state has become irrelevant, or that it should be conceded to the forces of globalism. But it is more urgent than ever to 'place' the nation-state itself, demystify its claims and organize against it, if only as a means to resuscitating the connection between place and nation – this time from below" (Dirlik, "Place-Based Imagination," 35).
- 26 Pennee, "Literary Citizenship," 83.
- 27 Pennee, "Literary Citizenship," 76.
- 28 Terence Wesley-Smith, "Self-determination in Oceania," *Race & Class* 48.3 (2007): 29-46, 33.
- 29 Wesley-Smith, "Self-determination in Oceania," 34.
- 30 Wesley-Smith, "Self-determination in Oceania," 41.
- 31 Epele Hau'ofa, *We Are the Ocean: Selected Works* (Honolulu: U of Hawai'i P, 2008) 27-40.
- 32 Hau'ofa, *We Are the Ocean*, 51. Similarly, Jocelyn Linnekin notes, "Alan Howard has pointed out [...] an important characteristic of Hawaiian (and perhaps more broadly, Polynesian) categorical ascriptions, noting that Hawaiian kinship and ethnicity emphasize inclusion rather than exclusion [...]." From such a point of view, it is not strange that a "Samoan-style kava ceremony marked rites for the first launching of the Hawaiian voyaging canoe *Hōkūle'a*" [Jocelyn Linnekin, "The Politics of Culture in the Pacific," *Cultural Identity and Ethnicity in the Pacific*, eds. Jocelyn Linnekin and Lin Poyer (Honolulu: U of Hawai'i P, 1990) 149-173, 156, 160].
- 33 Hau'ofa, *We Are the Ocean*, 42.

- 34 Hau'ofa, *We Are the Ocean*, 50.
- 35 Hau'ofa, *We Are the Ocean*, 50.
- 36 Indeed, Hau'ofa's own reasoning, excluding "Pacific Ocean islands, from Japan through the Philippines and Indonesia" from Oceania because they are "adjacent to the Asian mainland [and] do not have oceanic cultures" (*We Are the Ocean* 53), seems somewhat arbitrarily to draw a line between Asians and Oceanians. Vilsoni Hereniko cautions against assumptions of Oceanic harmony: "The sea of Oceania may be vast, but no one I know is fighting for a piece of the ocean to build a house on. Instead, everyone wants a plot of land they can call their own" ("David and Goliath: A Response to 'The Oceanic Imaginary'," *The Contemporary Pacific* 13.1 (Spring 2001): 163-168, 167-68).
- 37 See Vicente M. Diaz and J. Kēhaulani Kauanui, "Native Pacific Cultural Studies on the Edge," *The Contemporary Pacific* 13.2 (Fall 2001): 315-341. Drawing on Micronesian navigators' method of triangulation in which islands are considered to be in motion while the canoe remains stationary, Diaz and Kauanui propose the canoe as a metaphor for communities on the move and "a tactical figure for indigenous political and cultural struggles" (317). Similarly, Joakim Peter, criticising the arbitrary drawing of national boundaries between the Micronesian islands of Guam and Chuuk, emphasises the life-sustaining importance of travel in Micronesian cultures and the canoe as a vehicle for the negotiation of boundaries ["Chuukese Travellers and the Idea of the Horizon;" *Asia Pacific Viewpoint* 41.3 (Dec. 2000): 253-267]. See also Elizabeth DeLoughrey's detailed analysis of both colonial and indigenous uses of the metaphor of the canoe in a chapter of her book, *Routes and Roots Navigating Caribbean and Pacific Island Literatures* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2007), entitled "Vessels of the Pacific: An Ocean in the Blood." DeLoughrey "traces the ways in which the Pacific voyaging canoe has been utilized by agents of colonialism and indigenous sovereignty [to promote] "contiguous forms of Pacific regionalism" (99-100), drawing attention to the tendency of canoe narratives to "reiterate the gendered logic of national belonging" (98) and to privilege "metaphors of movement and fluidity that ultimately are embedded in the etymology and semantics of the term diaspora itself: sperm and blood" (100). For an alternative reading of the metaphorical associations of the canoe, linking sovereignty with the bodily image of breath, see Otto Heim, "Breath as Metaphor of Sovereignty and Connectedness in Pacific Island Poetry," *New Literatures Review* 47-48 (2011): 165-180.
- 38 For another example in a similar vein, see Teresia K. Teaiwa's "Lomani Viti: Reflections on Patriotic Literature from Post-Coup(s) Fiji" *SPAN* 53 (April 2004): 82-104. Intending to show "how [...] particular representations of identity interrupt and intervene on a nationalist imaginary, and assist in the patriotic project of nation-building," Teaiwa, like Appiah, distinguishes between patriotism, "based on a desire to contribute, to build a nation," and nationalism, "a desire to assert the legitimacy of one's claim on an identity or resources over the claims of others" (85). For Teaiwa, too, doing the national differently requires nurturing "the power of the imagination" and recognising that "[l]iterature and the arts are the cornerstones of a nation's imagination" (92-93).

- 39 Penelope Schoeffel, "Social Change," *Tides of History: The Pacific Islands in the Twentieth Century*, eds. K.R. Howe, Robert C. Kiste, and Brij V. Lal (Honolulu: U of Hawaii P, 1994) 350-380, 358.
- 40 Schoeffel, "Social Change," 375.
- 41 Robert C. Kiste, "United States," *Tides of History*, eds. Howe et al.: 227-257, 246.
- 42 Terence Wesley-Smith, "Australia and New Zealand," *Tides of History*, eds. Howe et al.: 195-226, 200; Kiste, "United States," 249; Peter Larmour, "Political Institutions," *Tides of History*, eds. Howe et al.: 381-405, 384 and 389.
- 43 Ron Crocombe, *The South Pacific* (Suva, Fiji: University of the South Pacific, 2001) 66.
- 44 Cluny Macpherson, "Transnationalism and Transformation in Samoan Society," *Globalization and Culture Change in the Pacific Islands*, ed. Victoria S. Lockwood (Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2004) 165-181, 178.
- 45 Macpherson, "Transnationalism and Transformation," 179.
- 46 See the detailed chronology in Paul Sharrad, *Albert Wendt and Pacific Literature: Circling the Void* (Auckland: Auckland UP, 2003) xiv-xvi.
- 47 Jackie Pualani Johnson, "Afterword: A Portrait of John Kneubuhl," *Think of a Garden and Other Plays*, John Kneubuhl (Honolulu: U of Hawai'i P, 1997) 251-266, 256.
- 48 Michael Dene Vought, *Polynesian History, Culture, and Mythology as an Antecedent for Dynamic Theatre: Two Trilogies* (PhD Dissertation, University of Utah, 1994) 193.
- 49 Vilsoni Hereniko, "An Interview with John A. Kneubuhl: Comic Theater of Samoa," *Mānoa* 5.1 (Summer 1993): 99-105, 100.
- 50 Johnson, "Afterword," 258.
- 51 John Kneubuhl, *Think of a Garden and Other Plays* (Honolulu: U of Hawai'i P, 1997) 96.
- 52 Johnson translates the title as "anthem of lamentation" ("Afterword," 260).
- 53 Hereniko, "An Interview," 104.
- 54 Kneubuhl, *Think of a Garden*, 148.
- 55 Kneubuhl, *Think of a Garden*, 109.
- 56 Kneubuhl, *Think of a Garden*, 172.
- 57 Kneubuhl, *Think of a Garden*, 246.
- 58 Completed in 1975, *Mele Kanikau* is the oldest of the three plays, while *A Play: A Play* and *Think of a Garden* were completed in 1990 and 1991 respectively. According to Kneubuhl's own instructions, "the plays must be presented, in print or on stage, in this order: (1) *Think of a Garden* [...] (2) *Mele Kanikau* [...] (3) *A Play: A Play* [...]" (Johnson, "Afterword," 257).
- 59 Caroline Sinavaiana-Gabbard, "John Kneubuhl's 'Polynesian' Theater at the Crossroads: At Play in the Fields of Cultural Identity," *Amerasia Journal* 26.2 (2000): 209-233, 227.

- 60 Albert Wendt, *Inside Us the Dead: Poems 1961 to 1974* (Auckland: Longman Paul, 1980) 7-14.
- 61 Vilsoni Hereniko and David Hanlon, "An Interview with Albert Wendt," *Inside Out: Literature, Cultural Politics, and Identity in the New Pacific*, eds. Vilsoni Hereniko and Rob Wilson (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 1999) 85-103, 95.
- 62 Albert Wendt, "Pacific Maps and Fiction(s): A Personal Journey," *Perceiving Other Worlds*, ed. Edwin Thumboo (Singapore: Times Academic, 1991) 179-210, 180.
- 63 Wendt, "Pacific Maps and Fiction(s)," 188.
- 64 Wendt, "Pacific Maps and Fiction(s)," 202.
- 65 Wendt, "Pacific Maps and Fiction(s)," 207.
- 66 Wendt, "Pacific Maps and Fiction(s)," 202.
- 67 Hereniko and Hanlon, "An Interview," 92.
- 68 DeLoughrey, *Routes and Roots*, 206.
- 69 As Paul Sharrad notes: "Food is the governing metaphor" in *Black Rainbow* (Albert Wendt, 218).
- 70 Albert Wendt, *Black Rainbow* (Honolulu: U of Hawai'i P, 1995), 158. The name, *tangata moni*, joins the Maori word for people (*tangata*) and the Samoan word for truth (*moni*), but as Liz DeLoughrey points out, "'moni' [...] is also the Maori transliteration of money, or economic value" (*Routes and Roots*, 221). The name thus ironically also alludes to the commoditisation of urbanised indigenous experience in both popular and critic discourses.
- 71 Wendt, *Black Rainbow*, 178.
- 72 Wendt, *Black Rainbow*, 196.
- 73 Wendt, *Black Rainbow*, 243.
- 74 Wendt, *Black Rainbow*, 261.
- 75 As Sharrad's and DeLoughrey's richly contextualized readings of *Black Rainbow* demonstrate, the novel rewards close attention to the allegorical meanings of etymological puns and historical allusions embedded in names, even as it leads us to question the value of such clues. As Sharrad notes, for instance, the protagonist's middle name, "*mailei*," in Samoan "means 'a trap' [which] clearly relates to the plot of the novel (and could well serve as a warning to the reader)" (Albert Wendt, 221). The story of one of the Tangata Moni exemplifies this as well, not just by its focus, which Sharrad describes as a "modern Hansel and Gretel tale of gourmet obsession" (218), but even more compellingly by the fact that, after captivating the reader over seventeen pages, it is abruptly left unfinished. See Wendt, *Black Rainbow*, 158-175.
- 76 Wendt, *Black Rainbow*, 267.
- 77 Albert Wendt, "Introduction," *Lali: A Pacific Anthology*, ed. Albert Wendt (Auckland: Longman Paul, 1980) xiii-xix, xv-xvi.
- 78 Wendt, "Introduction," xvi.

- 79 Wilson Harris, "Literacy and the Imagination – A Talk," *Selected Essays of Wilson Harris: The Unfinished Genesis of the Imagination*, ed. A.J.M. Bundy (London: Routledge, 1999) 75-89, 81.
- 80 Harris, "Literacy and the Imagination," 82.
- 81 Ernest Renan, "What Is a Nation?" trans. Martin Thom, *Nation and Narration*, ed. Homi K. Bhabha (London: Routledge, 1990) 8-22, 19.
- 82 Renan, "What Is a Nation?" 11.
- 83 Our reading of Wendt and Kneubuhl, in this sense, supports Donna Palmateer Pennee's suggestion that "[i]n this present temporality and spatiality of the nation, [...] literary studies speak to and speak for, to quote Adrienne Rich on the political problem of the pronoun, 'We who are not the same. We who are many and do not want to be the same'" ("Literary Citizenship," 80).