

UNDERGROUNDS IN FLUX: NUCLEAR TESTING AND RESISTANT POSSIBILITIES IN
ALBERT WENDT'S *BLACK RAINBOW*

By

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ABSTRACT

By contextualizing Albert Wendt's *Black Rainbow* with histories of nuclear testing in Oceania, this thesis contends that the novel's representations of underground spaces critique the practices of underground nuclear testing that predominated in the late Cold War. The nuclear colonial powers attempted to domesticate the underground in willful ignorance of the ways that the subterranean sphere shapeshifts mercurially between domestic and wild. This thesis incorporates Kamau Brathwaite's framework of tidalectics to rebuke the perceived dichotomy between land and ocean and to show that the underground is inherently multifaceted and imbued with resistant potential. In examining the plural meanings and attendant critical possibilities presented by *Black Rainbow*'s subterranean settings, I articulate the ambivalences lurking within colonial conceptions of these spaces and examine interconnections between ideas of the underground, cultural conceptions of ecology, and feminist decolonial theory. The relationality between these elements is central to *Black Rainbow*'s indictment of the colonial conceptions of land (and human-land interactions) that justified underground nuclear testing programs during the Cold War and continue to shape the structural conditions producing and exacerbating contemporary ecological crises.

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PREFACE

The focus of this project was informed by my positionality as a U.S.-based white settler from Australia. Moving across the Pacific Ocean allowed me to see even more clearly the continuities and contrasts between manifestations of settler colonialism in Australia and the U.S. I am driven to unravel the interwoven cultural narratives of these countries, especially as they are operationalized throughout Oceania. For me, looking to the late Cold War felt like the right first step in attempting to historicize the contemporary landscape of (neo)colonialism in this region. While my identity has been integral to determining the character of this project (as it is for every researcher), I am deeply aware of the limitations I bring to this work as a non-Indigenous person.

In this thesis, I have attempted to honor the contributions of Indigenous peoples in Oceania, while structuring my argument as a critique of the settler colonial constructs with which I am most familiar. My work owes much to the writings of many Indigenous scholars, including but not limited to Albert Wendt (Samoan), Epeli Hau'ofa (Tongan), Teresia Teaiwa (I-Kiribati and African American), Joyce Pualani Warren (Diasporic Black Kanaka Maoli), and Linda Tuhiwai Smith (Ngāti Awa, Ngāti Porou, and Tūhourangi). The insights of these and other scholars have been indispensable to my ever-developing understanding of Oceania and my thinking about Indigenous resistance movements, historical and contemporary expressions of colonialism and their effects, and the ideologies informing nuclear testing programs.

Producing decolonial scholarship requires humility and curiosity. I am proud to share this thesis now, and I look forward to further developing my research practices through self-reflexive critique and thoughtful community engagement¹ as I continue studying political and cultural forms of resistance against colonialism and ecological violence in Oceania.

¹ My particular understanding of these research practices is informed by Nêhiyaw and Saulteaux scholar Margaret Kovach's *Indigenous Methodologies: Characteristics, Conversations, and Contexts* (2nd ed.).

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The blood of the sky coned to anchor the atua of volcanoes to the sea.
—Albert Wendt, *Black Rainbow*

archipelago: fragments: a geological plate being crushed by the pacific's curve...

*the history reflects the pressure and passage of lava, storm, stone, earthquake,
crack, coral: their rise and fall of landscapes: destructions, lost memories...*
—Kamau Brathwaite, "Caribbean Man in Space and Time"

INTRODUCTION

The mushroom cloud looms large in cultural recollections of the Cold War, but as tensions persisted throughout the latter half of the twentieth century, the predominant nuclear powers increasingly cast aside such spectacular displays of destructive potentiality. In the face of opposition to the clear dangers of atmospheric nuclear testing, the U.K., the U.S.S.R., and the U.S. signed the 1963 Limited Nuclear Test Ban Treaty, agreeing to cease atmospheric, underwater, and outer space nuclear testing. The treaty only permitted testing underground, as the properties of the lithosphere made it seemingly perfect for containing both nuclear fallout and the most attention-garnering visual effects of the explosions; this property of dual containment was attractive to states wanting to curb the mounting public opposition to their Cold War testing programs. The Atomic Energy Commission's former Acting Chairman James T. Ramey referenced the perceived safety of underground nuclear testing, writing that "most of the radioactive materials" would be "entrapped by the falling rock" (Ramey 35). Taken figuratively, this statement seems to betray something of the double motivation for the change in approach to nuclear testing: the now "radioactive" public image of the mushroom cloud would, along with the chemical fallout, be "entrapped," and therefore no longer a serious obstacle to the continuation of nuclear testing, or so the treaty's signatories likely hoped.

Although France did not sign the treaty, President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing eventually bowed to pressure and stated that French testing at Moruroa¹ and Fangataufa would be conducted underground from 1975 onwards (United Press International 8). The interring of the mushroom cloud did not eliminate public opposition to nuclear weapons development, but it did engender an atmosphere in which mainstream anxieties about nuclearization “remained latent” (Cordle 113). In 1975, however, affiliates of the Nuclear Free and Independent Pacific (NFIP) movement produced the Pacific People’s Charter for a Nuclear Free and Independent Pacific, asserting their opposition to “all tests of nuclear explosive devices” (R. Smith, appendix, 229). Throughout the 1970s and 80s, Greenpeace established anti-nuclear advocacy as a central component of their activism, with the *Rainbow Warrior* among the ships used in demonstrations at nuclear test sites throughout the Pacific (Robie 32-33). On the tenth of July 1985, French secret service agents bombed the *Rainbow Warrior* while it was waiting to depart from Auckland Harbour for a protest voyage to Moruroa; one person died as a result (Robie 98-100, 104). Fewer than two months earlier, the *Rainbow Warrior* had evacuated over three hundred people from Rongelap, an atoll which remained radioactive from U.S. nuclear tests conducted some thirty years before (Robie 47-66).

Māori artist Ralph Hotere (Te Aupōuri) made the lithograph *Black Rainbow, Mururoa* [1986] in response to the attack on the *Rainbow Warrior*, and this artwork was a source of inspiration for the novel *Black Rainbow*, written by Samoan author Albert Wendt and first published in 1992. Hotere’s lithograph, created amid the simmering international and regional discontent with ongoing nuclear proliferation, appears in the text as a historic reference to a period preceding the post-nuclear Aotearoa/New Zealand in which the novel is set. The visual

¹ Michael Pugh contends that “French military authorities called the atoll ‘Mururoa,’ but the correct spelling, based on Mangareva dialect, is ‘Moruroa’” (13). For this reason, I use Moruroa throughout this essay, except when quoting texts in which it is spelled differently.

language of the Hotere lithograph is central to the novel's commentary on its nuclear context. Its omnipresence throughout the story doesn't only emphasize the continuation of the Cold War atmosphere into the 1990s; *Black Rainbow, Mururoa* also asserts the relevance of Indigenous resistance in the late Cold War and the attendant power differential between the global influence of Euro-American nation-states and Oceania's local(ized) resistance against exploitation by the nuclear powers. Hotere's lithograph was created after the Limited Nuclear Test Ban Treaty was signed and the Pacific People's Charter for a Nuclear Free and Independent Pacific was authored, but while underground nuclear testing continued unabated, and grassroots opposition was being actively suppressed. The lithograph signifies the challenge that grassroots activists face in attempting to confront Euro-American dominance. Initially, Wendt's novel seems to illustrate the ultimate triumph of hegemon over resistor: at the outset, Indigeneity has been entirely erased from public life in Aotearoa. However, the persistent presence of Hotere's *Black Rainbow, Mururoa* as a symbol guiding the protagonist establishes a sense of faith in the ability of a minoritized perspective to effectively disrupt dominant discourses. This same mood is reflected in the *Pacific Islands Monthly's* reporting on the bombing of the *Rainbow Warrior*, in which the publication points out "that big city people often under-estimate the powers of curiosity and observation inherent in small communities," powers which enabled Auckland's residents to supply evidence contributing directly to France's censure for its involvement in the attack (12).

The underground is a site of contestation between these geopolitical hegemony and grassroots or localized movements. It functions in three general (and sometimes overlapping) ways in many narratives: as a space of concealment, as a realm of resistance, and as a manifestation of the unconscious. Throughout the Cold War, the nuclear powers attempted to

appropriate the underground as a secretive nuclear testing site, while groups such as the Weather Underground exemplified the metaphorical reliance upon its long association with covert resistance. The regime of underground nuclear testing was enabled and indelibly marked by a deep ambivalence in the nuclear colonial understanding of the underground space, whereby the nuclear powers valued certain qualities of the underground, like separation, containment, and concealment, that are often associated with counter-hegemonic organizing, and attempted to claim these traits as *their sole dominion*. In service of nuclear proliferation, states often used the underground in contradictory ways, requiring it to function as a secure storehouse for nuclear waste itself *and* as a shelter that would protect citizens from radioactive fallout.

The Western nuclear colonial powers attempted to domesticate (and naturalize their domestication of) the underground in willful ignorance of the way the subterranean atmosphere shapeshifts mercurially between domestic and wild. *Black Rainbow* elucidates how the multifaceted spaces and ideas encompassed by the underground evade attempts by powerful groups to monopolize or foreclose their potentiality. Instead, while the governing Tribunal in the novel, like the nuclear powers of the late-Cold War, attempts to appropriate the subterranean sphere for its own ends, the underground is utilized for other projects, including radical forms of resistance and interconnectivity, and expresses its own inherent generativity. These facets of the underground character collide and overlap in ways that the rigid mindset of the nuclear colonial powers is unable to predict, explain, or control. The spaces of the underground in *Black Rainbow* evoke *both* the underground nuclear testing that predominated in the late Cold War and the counter-hegemonic resistance most often associated with “underground” in the metaphorical sense. By drawing together metaphorical and literal interpretations of the underground, Wendt’s novel challenges the conventional separation of symbol from matter and illustrates the

intertwinement of these forms of meaning. Such intertwinement persists even in colonial logics that attempt to devalue the metaphorical and claim the scientific for themselves.

The novel's undergrounds appear in different forms, and the complexity of their representation demands an interpretive dexterity which, I would like to suggest, is well provided by Kamau Brathwaite's tidalectics, a decolonial framework of analytic fluidity. When read tidalectically, *Black Rainbow*'s undergrounds reveal collisions between contrasting associations and illustrate the power of creative counter-hegemonic movements working within colonial-imposed constraints to destabilize the foundations of oppressive power structures. By drawing parallels between settler colonialism and the colonization of the underground for nuclear testing, the novel critiques underground nuclear testing as an exemplar of the ambivalent and contradictory ways that (settler) colonial epistemes regard the spheres and subjects over which they purport to wield control, including Indigenous populations, the lithosphere, and more-than-human nature more broadly. Additionally, in highlighting the resistant possibilities of the protagonist's instinctive coalition-building with nature and other rebels, Wendt's novel delegitimizes dualistic perspectives which reify and render asymmetrical putative dichotomies such as underground/aboveground, inside/outside, male/female, land/sea, nature/culture, and reason/emotion to bolster a sense of settler inevitability.

Black Rainbow follows a mostly unnamed protagonist. The authoritarian Aotearoa of the novel is run by "the Tribunal" and its President, who have outlawed history and mandated that citizens live in the "ever-moving present" (Wendt 189). At the novel's outset, the protagonist completes the "Dehistorying" proceedings, demonstrating to the Tribunal his complete adherence to the values of the state. Upon completing this process, he is sent on a quest to find his family, whom the government has hidden from him (Wendt 33-35). However, as he

undertakes this challenge, he gradually comes to learn the truth about the country and himself; he is Indigenous, and the state has “reordinarinise[d]” him on multiple occasions (Wendt 225-8). “Reordinarinising” is a process in which an individual’s memories and sense of self are “erased” and “replaced” with alternatives that are acceptable to the Tribunal (Wendt 228). On a structural level, “reordinarinising” is designed to uphold the settler state and prevent any kind of reckoning with colonality (Hisatake 83-84). However, there is a small segment of the population, made up of “descendants of ancient Maori rebels[,...]urbanised Polynesians from the islands, and rebel Pakeha²” (Wendt 223) for whom “reordinarinising” is ineffectual: they always return to their true identities. Such individuals self-identify as the “True Ones” in opposition to the “otherworlders,” meaning citizens who accept the worldview promoted by the Tribunal. Most “True Ones” (also called “Tangata Moni”) are of mixed Indigenous heritage, and their communities are located in whares³ or “sanctuaries” underground (Wendt 158, 225). The protagonist connects with a group of “Tangata Moni” and later learns that he is also a “True One:” after every “reordinarinising” process, he “reverts” (Wendt 225-231). The protagonist’s coming to consciousness is an uneven and unresolved process. He oscillates between rebelliousness and obedience before being caught by the Tribunal. The reader has to interpret the final outcome from a host of possible “endings/beginnings” or their own “improvise[d]” alternatives (Wendt 267).

The protagonist has been assigned several different identities throughout his lifetime, and the temporal and conceptual chasm he must breach to effectively access his Indigeneity is vast. The Tribunal’s disavowal of Indigeneity and the “Tangata Moni’s” habitation beneath “otherworlder” society is evocative of the way that Indigenous subjects have been excluded from

² Pākehā is the Māori word for a white person living in New Zealand (Moorfield “Pākehā, n.3”).

³ *Te Aka: Māori Dictionary* defines a whare as a “house, building, residence, dwelling, shed, hut, habitation” (Moorfield “whare, n.1”).

the colonially-defined category of “humanity.” Therefore, although he does not cross species boundaries, the protagonist’s disrupted pursuit of cultural consciousness aligns him with the “transformational characters” who, as Joni Adamson argues, enable alternative understandings of human-nature relationality (43). Such transformation enables Wendt to imagine what Mignolo proposes as “[a] delinking that leads to de-colonial epistemic shift and brings to the foreground other epistemologies” might look like on the scale of individual consciousness (“Delinking” 453)⁴. The protagonist’s impermanent “eras[ures]” (Wendt 228) demonstrate that the indisputable world-view that the Tribunal embodies is actually inherently vulnerable to critique. The non-linearity of the protagonist’s personal development coheres with the novel’s continual disruption of a stable or singular interpretation, a quality which opens the novel to the possibilities of a tidalectic analysis. In examining the contradictory meanings and attendant critical possibilities presented by *Black Rainbow*’s subterranean settings, I will articulate the points of interconnection between ideas of the underground, cultural conceptions of ecology, and feminist decolonial theory. I will also show how ambivalence, as conceptualized by Homi Bhabha, Teresia Teaiwa, and Gabriele Schwab, plays an important role in understanding the undergrounds of the novel. The relationality between this selection of concepts is central to the challenge *Black Rainbow* poses to colonial conceptions of land (and land-human relationality) that not only justified underground nuclear testing programs but also continue to shape the structural conditions producing and exacerbating contemporary ecological crises.

⁴ In this essay, Mignolo attempts to extend the concept of “delinking” as elaborated by Samir Amin in his 1990 book *Delinking: Towards a Polycentric World*. In Mignolo’s opinion, Amin’s Marxist approach to “delinking” is limited by what he perceives as its entrenchment “within the rhetoric of modernity and the logic of coloniality” (Mignolo, “Delinking” 462). Mignolo’s reimagining of this concept is heavily informed by Anibal Quijano’s arguments for “epistemic decolonization” (Quijano qtd. in Mignolo 499).

SECTION I: Nuclearization and the Nature of Neo-Colonialism

A convoluted process led to the adoption of the Limited Nuclear Test Ban Treaty was convoluted, and the reasoning behind the treaty's terms was multilayered. As Toshihiro Higuchi writes in *Political Fallout: Nuclear Weapons Testing and the Making of a Global Environmental Crisis*, although U.S. President John F. Kennedy evinced a seemingly-genuine moral concern for the human cost of nuclear fallout, the machinations that ultimately produced the Limited Nuclear Test Ban Treaty were not driven solely—or even perhaps primarily—by safety concerns: “Mutual distrust and suspicion between the Cold War rivals finally dashed any hope for a comprehensive ban and paved the way for an atmospheric ban. The Partial Test Ban Treaty, then, was a hybrid construct of the Cold War mind-set and global environmental consciousness” (Higuchi 163). Volume VII of the State Department's 1961-1963 *Foreign Relations of the United States*, entitled “Arms Control and Disarmament,” illustrates the complex factors that played into the adoption of the Limited Nuclear Test Ban Treaty and, with it, a commitment to only test nuclear weapons underground. A briefing document produced for Kennedy in mid-1961 accounts for both the downsides and advantages of underground nuclear testing. The authors note that although underground testing was more expensive than atmospheric testing and less effective in yielding many forms of valuable data, it nevertheless carried “advantages” beyond merely “minimizing problems of contamination...for example, to deny intelligence information to the enemy, for diagnostics in specific instances, and for relative freedom from weather delays” (“Arms Control” doc. #74). Another factor motivating the prohibition of aboveground testing was similarly strategic, with Kennedy's Special Assistant Arthur M. Schlesinger noting in 1962 that “[s]ince our underground testing capability is greater than the Soviet Union's, we would surely stand to gain by an arrangement which allowed underground testing but banned

atmospheric testing” (“Arms Control” doc. #116). The importance of these details stem from their illumination of the intuitive but not always externally apparent political truth that reforms are rarely driven entirely by the concerns of a constituency; those concerns must align with the priorities of the administration. The fact that the U.S. administration was so interested in concealment shows their faith in the notion that they could avoid critique by hiding the evidence of ongoing nuclear proliferation, but it also demonstrates their reliance on the properties of the underground in a way which complicates its long-held association with counter-hegemonic resistance; its assets can be appropriated for undemocratic action driven by powerful interests.

In fact, it is debatable to what extent public opinion influenced the drafting of the Limited Nuclear Test Ban Treaty at all. There is evidence that advisors to the president had reservations about how effective underground testing would be in ameliorating negative public perceptions of nuclear weapons development, because these advisors felt that many people’s negative attitudes towards nuclear weapons were highly generalized: that the public “closely associated” radioactive debris “with *any* kind of nuclear explosion” (“Arms Control” doc #1; italics mine). In a 1961 “National Intelligence Estimate,” the CIA speculated on the likelihood of public uproar should the U.S. resume underground nuclear testing after a three-year moratorium on all tests, anticipating that “explanations [of the lower risks associated with underground testing] would not go far in neutralizing the critical popular reaction” (“Arms Control” doc #1). The CIA’s attitude towards this perceived bias is telling, as the authors describe the public’s strong opposition to nuclear testing in all its forms as “spring[ing]...from emotional attitudes not readily accessible to rational argumentation” (“Arms Control” doc #1). This statement attempts to limit the terms of the debate to the realm of empirical data, ignoring any opposition that took issue with the philosophical underpinnings of mutually-assured destruction. Criticisms

predicated on the value of conserving the more-than-human world are rendered “unreasonable,” the psychic impact of reckoning with a potential nuclear apocalypse is minimized, and any alternate approaches to bolstering national security are discounted. The authors of the Pacific People’s Charter refuse this constraint, however, and instead directly critique the justifications of nuclear proliferation itself by referring to nuclear deterrence as “a strategy of warfare that has no winners, no liberators and imperils the survival of all humankind” (R. Smith, appendix, 227). Additionally, they insist that the statistical improbability of underground testing mishaps is of little comfort given the severity of the stakes: “Only one nuclear submarine has to be lost in the sea, or one nuclear warhead dumped in our ocean...and our livelihood is endangered for centuries” (R. Smith, appendix, 228). There is a profound mismatch between the nuclear powers’ rationalization of the nuclear risk in the Pacific and the irrevocably transformed realities that would impact those who live in the region should something go wrong. This psychic impact of nuclear proliferation has been described by Gabriele Schwab as a form of “slow nuclear terror” (32); the possibility of the apocalypse is ever-present and impossible to rule out, even as those in power insist that such fears are irrational. The arguments set out in the preamble to the Pacific People’s Charter stem from a place of political critique that refuses to be delimited by the nuclear powers’ standards of “rationality.”

In his history of the Nuclear Free and Independent Pacific movement (NFIP), Roy H. Smith shows the chasm between the values informing the nuclear powers’ and Pacific activists’ positions on nuclearization to be intertwined with broader tensions throughout the region. “It was argued” in the NFIP “that the nuclear issue should be seen within the much broader context of neo-colonialism” (R. Smith 26). That is, nuclear weapons testing in Oceania is just one manifestation of a much broader pattern of “oppression, exploitation and subordination of the

indigenous people of the Pacific” (“Pacific People’s Charter,” R. Smith, appendix, 227) that has taken place in the name of Western progress, accumulation, and national security. This argument resonates with Schwab’s understanding of how nuclear testing sites are naturalized as “zones of radical abandonment in which people and lands are treated as disposable” (32). The Pacific Islands occupy a particular place within this structure because the nuclear powers can plausibly claim that the small, coral atolls in use are uninhabited by humans, while eliding the complex relationality that connects Oceanic peoples and lands throughout the region and denying the risk of fallout being carried to other islands. Furthermore, “nuclear necropolitics,” as Schwab elaborates it, “operates within a culture of invisibility and secrecy” (32). Schwab’s point is illustrated by the reduction in visual evidence of the detonations following the 1963 treaty. The islands of Oceania and their populations are also rendered invisible by way of the “longstanding colonial understanding of the island as a laboratory” (DeLoughrey, “The Myth” 168). This myth, especially in the Pacific context, is dependent upon the metropolitan perception of the Pacific Islands as inherently remote from the broader world and from each other. Even as Western states knew this perception to be a fallacy through their interactions with Pan-Pacific activist groups, they still felt secure that the comparatively small populations of the Pacific Islands would be incapable of attracting global attention with their political demands.

Wendt’s *Black Rainbow* challenges this perception by making the work of a Māori artist primarily known in Aotearoa the anchor that connects the protagonist to his Indigenous identity and catalyzes his rebellion, during which he becomes notorious around Aotearoa and the world (181). The use of Ralph Hotere’s lithograph in the novel evokes the convergence of antinuclear activism with anticolonial activism, in which underground nuclear testing is uniquely significant, both metaphorically and literally. The opacity of the lithograph’s meaning, as the protagonist

perceives it, speaks to the neo-colonial Tribunal's burying of the settler state's true history, a concealment which allows for the naturalization of the settler state and the erasure of Indigenous memory, including of nuclear colonialism enacted beneath Moruroa and Fangataufa decades after the notorious Bravo test at Bikini Atoll. *Black Rainbow*, *Mururoa* hangs on the wall of the protagonist's house, and it confounds him as he tries to understand it. He recognizes "the thick black arch to be the rainbow. But the numbers, 1 to 14, on either side of the upsurging cloud? The countdown to what?" (Wendt 10). This moment establishes the protagonist's analytical practices at the text's beginning as focusing on "surface" connotations. Much of his journey to come will lead him to disinter deeper inferences and recognize the connectivity between surface expression and core significance. Although in this moment he recognizes the eponymic black rainbow, he does not think to question its implications; the title of the piece tells him there should be a black rainbow, and that is reason enough for its existence, just as the Tribunal tells him he must attend "dehistorying" proceedings daily, and thus he does so without question. The countdown from one to fourteen has no such extrinsic justification, however, and it perplexes him. The number fourteen is commonly associated, in Western tradition, with the stations of the cross, and his unfamiliarity with this concept illuminates something about the distinctly secular world of the Tribunal's Aotearoa. If Western foreign policy during the Cold War revolved around the presumption of humankind's scientific and rational mastery over the natural world, then we see the reverberations of this in *Black Rainbow*'s representation of a new post-Cold War world. However, the novel will also come to show the continued and contradictory reliance on messianic figures in the neo-colonial imaginary, as the protagonist himself takes on this role in the Tribunal's global broadcast of his struggle.

The countdown of the lithograph's "doomsday clock" persists throughout the text as a symbol of the protagonist's increasing critical awareness of his surroundings (Wendt 242). As will be discussed later in more detail, the novel concludes with the protagonist burying the lithograph as "it tick[s] vigorously" (Wendt 243). This connection of the countdown to the underground, along with the material and visual character of the lithograph itself, invites a conceptual connection to the underground nuclear testing modality specifically. The "upsurging cloud" (Wendt 10) in the lithograph is black and has a rectangular shape scored with lines, suggesting a mine shaft, with the word "Mururoa" above the rectangle implying that the land of the atoll is atop the detonation cavity within which the arch of the rainbow—the explosion itself—is confined. Ralph Hotere was notoriously enigmatic when pressed about the meaning of his work. "Silence, like darkness, is a form of freedom" (loc. 3394), writes Hotere's biographer Vincent O'Sullivan when reflecting upon this trait. In the context of Wendt's novel, then, the mysteries of the lithograph stand as a foil to the clearly demarcated norms mandated by the Tribunal. The most important aspects of the protagonist's coming-to-consciousness do not take the form of unraveling a conspiracy, but rather of welcoming uncertainty and plurality of meaning, including the myriad contradictions that riddle the structure of the Tribunal's Aotearoa. In this way, the darkness of the underground becomes analogous to the obscured truths that are hidden in plain sight by the Tribunal.

SECTION II: Gender, Indigeneity, and Ecology

In her book *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, Val Plumwood contends “that western culture has treated the human/nature relation as a dualism and that this explains many of the problematic features of the west’s treatment of nature which underlie the environmental crisis, especially the *western construction of human identity as ‘outside’ nature*” (2, italics mine). This nature/human dichotomy might best be understood in relation to the more-commonly cited nature/culture separation. As many Black feminists have shown, the notion of the human has never been universal⁵. The nature/culture dichotomy helps to illustrate this, as the concept of “culture” is hegemonically defined from a European perspective, and therefore those whose culture does not adhere to Eurocentric expectations are instead aligned with nature in both the nature/culture duality and the human/nature one. Nishitani Osamu explains this phenomenon in “Anthropos and Humanitas: Two Western Concepts of ‘Human Being,’” noting that *humanitas* exists in a dichotomous and unequal relationship with the concept of *anthropos*. *Humanitas* is a privileged space meant only for those who meet Western standards or personhood, while *anthropos* is othered and considered non-Western by definition—a perceived quirk which led to Western researchers observing and defining non-Western societies through fields like anthropology, the name of which is derived from the concept of *anthropos* (Osamu 261). The inherently-Western people of *humanitas* self-identify as holding knowledge that is inaccessible to their non-Western counterparts (266). According to Osamu, “this asymmetrical relation between ‘*humanitas*’ and ‘*anthropos*’ is being continually reproduced” (268); the phenomenon of nuclear testing in the Pacific illustrates this, where the employment of coral atolls under Indigenous stewardship as test sites expresses “the conjunction of natural resources needed by *humanitas* in areas inhabited by

⁵ See Wynter, Jackson, and Weheliye, for example.

anthropos” (Mignolo “Epistemic Disobedience” 161). The distinction between *humanitas* and *anthropos* shapes the political meanings of nuclear technology, elucidating how nuclear weapons can seem to both affirm humanity and existentially threaten it: they endorse the humanity of the “knowledgeable” Western nuclear testing powers and negate that of the Indigenous communities upon whose land the tests take place. Plumwood refers to the Western norms of exploiting nature (including in its broad, colonial definition) as “the master model” (23). This “master model” is characterized by “domination and transcendence of nature, in which freedom and virtue are construed in terms of control over, and distance from, the sphere of nature” (Plumwood 23). Ultimately, then, the West attempts to secure their humanity by asserting their imperviousness to forces beyond their control or explanation. However, as, *Black Rainbow* shows, this relationship is actually inherently unstable, with Western subjects also being unable to escape the nuclear anxiety fostered by Cold War proliferation. The contradictions within this relationship map onto the incongruous imaginings of the underground space both during the Cold War and today.

The “master model” exercised over nature by those within *humanitas* has been analyzed from feminist and decolonial perspectives, and scholars have illustrated its insidious and tenacious presence within neo-colonial modernity. In one example, DeLoughrey unsettles the dichotomization of “routes,” meaning a masculinized idea of exploration and dominance, “and roots,” which evoke a feminized notion of static locality (*Routes and Roots* 2). “Routes” are lionized within the “master model,” which depends upon drawing a “connection between women and nature” and ensuring their “mutual inferiorisation” (Plumwood 21). This connects not only to the marginalization of women, but also of nature itself, which is why Plumwood argues that broadening the “human” category to include all women is not sufficient to confront the troubles caused by this dualism. Without rethinking our understandings of nature, Plumwood writes, “the

old female/nature connection will be replaced by the dominant model of human distance from and transcendence and control of nature” (23). In such a narrow recuperation of women (itself an exclusionary and inherently racialized category) from their exile in the realm of nature, the ideological structure remains in place, and geopolitical hegemons can continually establish “[z]ones of sacrifice and exception...in which people and lands are treated as disposable” (Schwab 32). This “calculus of disposability” (Schwab 32) exemplifies the tandem subjugation of nature alongside gendered and racialized others and has particular relevance to understanding how nuclear testing sites were (and continue to be) selected and justified.

Black Rainbow does not attempt to extricate femininity or Indigeneity from nature, but it does reformulate the prescribed commonalities between them in order to critique the way that masculinist tropes naturalize certain understandings of human/nature relationships and render others invisible or illegitimate. When the protagonist and his wife, Margaret, take daily walks to Maungakiekie, an extinct volcano in Auckland, his wife is closely allied with the land. She comments on her dislike of the Maungakiekie Obelisk (Wendt 11), erected by a colonialist who wished to “memorialize” the Māori people whom he believed would soon be wiped out (Wensley). Later, as they are walking home, she says: ““They’re still here, aren’t they? The Pakeha have changed even the vegetation but *they’re* still here...they’ll always be here”” (Wendt 12, italics original). By recognizing both the continuity and change in the landscape over an extended period of time, she stands as a kind of conduit for the land’s self-articulation. “Organisms emerge from a discursive process,” Donna Haraway contends. “But humans are not the only actors in the construction of...entities” (Haraway 67). At Maungakiekie, the protagonist’s wife not only reads and critiques the discursive processes that attempt to naturalize white settler hegemony in Aotearoa; she also recognizes the nonhuman discourse attesting to the

continuing presence of Indigeneity. In doing so, she endorses the notion of ecological memory and agency, which is in inherent opposition to Western ideas of nature's passivity. The protagonist's wife intuitively understands Maungakiekie to be an "earth-being" as conceptualized by Marisol De la Cadena (qtd. in Adamson 34). By identifying the intertwined marginalization of women, Indigenous communities, and nature, it is possible to see the protagonist's wife not as *reduced* to her connection with nature, but as modelling "trans-corporeality" (Alaimo 2) with the "earth-beings" around her. In paraphrasing De la Cadena's explanation of "earth-beings," Adamson writes that they "might be categorized as 'things' or 'natural resources' within Western politics or science," so an acknowledgement of their agency challenges the attempted normalization of nature's subjugation by Western "humanity" (35). Scholars have critiqued the two-dimensional characterizations of Indigenous relationships to nature that romanticize, objectify, homogenize, and dehumanize Indigenous peoples (Schmitt et al. 64-67; L. Smith 56-57). Gumbaynggirr scholar Chels Alby Marshall asserts that Indigenous peoples in Australia "like Europeans, also significantly shaped and moulded the land" (133). What differentiates Western modes of relating to nature is their drive "to *dominate* nature" (Marshall 133; italics mine). In this moment in the novel, Margaret insists that even as the land has been visibly transformed by colonization, this domination is only surface level and cannot erase the features attesting to past and present Māori stewardship.

Colonial attempts to subjugate nature are not *only* based on its perceived passivity as a non-living thing, but rather as something proximate to *living* things that colonial logics also characterize as passive and/or inferior. Nature is persistently racialized and feminized, and the selection of nuclear testing sites is also reliant upon a "symbolic slippage between land and a woman's body, between colonization and sexual mastery" (Sawyer & Agrawal 79). In "bikinis

and other s/pacific n/oceans,” Teresia Teaiwa analyzes the way that the bikini swimsuit, named after the atoll where the U.S. ran a lengthy testing program, reveals “a supreme ambivalence” in the gendering and racialization of nuclear weapons and test sites (101). The bikini “manifests both a celebration and a forgetting of the nuclear power that...marginalizes and erases the living history of Pacific Islanders” (Teaiwa 87) by asserting a supposedly ahistorical and apolitical display of a sexualized white female form. Likewise, between 1952 and 1957, several Las Vegas showgirls served as atomic-themed pinups. The last of these, Lee Merwin, received the moniker “Miss Atomic Bomb” (Roy 61). A posed photograph of her is reproduced in Susan Roy’s *Bomboozled: How the U.S. Government Misled Itself and its People into Believing they Could Survive a Nuclear Attack* (61). In the image, her two-piece bathing suit is obscured by a fluffy, cotton-wool mushroom cloud stuck to her front. The shot is taken from a low angle so that her figure dwarfs the powerlines behind her and dominates the barren desert scene surrounding her, an effect which allegorizes the spectacle of her white feminine beauty to the awe-inducing magnificence of the bomb itself and, by extension, Euro-American power. “Miss Atom Bomb” wears a facial expression of transcendent delight to match the magnitude of all she symbolizes. Her painted lips are spread in an open-mouthed grin and her eyes are held softly shut; even as she towers over the landscape, she is utterly feminine and therefore non-threatening. This image clearly demonstrates a “celebration” of nuclear statehood, but the “ambivalence” Teaiwa refers to also hums beneath the surface of these images (87). A fact sheet from the U.S. Department of Energy describes the reception of “Miss Atomic Blast,” another nuclear beauty queen who appeared five years earlier than “Miss Atom Bomb.” A caption accompanying a published image of “Miss Atomic Blast” purportedly stated she was “radiating loveliness instead of deadly atomic particles” (1). The jarringly proximate acknowledgement of both the woman’s “loveliness” and

the “deadl[iness]” of nuclear technology emphasizes not only the ambivalent relationship between U.S. Americans and the bomb, but also the spatial distinctions that naturalize a simultaneous romanticizing of the mushroom cloud for white Americans in positions of power alongside the disquieting knowledge of the destruction being wrought on Indigenous peoples by the very same means in both the Pacific Islands and in supposedly “remote” regions of the U.S.

The racialization of the Bikini Islanders is set in opposition to the whiteness of “Miss Atom Bomb” and others donning the bikini swimsuits. In “Environmental Orientalisms,” Suzana Sawyer and Arun Agrawal write that “the feminine is not passively homogeneous: racialized identity imputes substantive difference” (80). While white femininity can call for protection, the exploitation and (sexual) domination of colonized lands and peoples, feminized and racialized as non-white, is a cornerstone of the colonial project (76). The relevance of this dynamic to underground nuclear testing can be seen in French president Jacques Chirac’s rebuttal to critiques of nuclear testing in French Polynesia, as described by Douglas Johnson: when quizzed on why he didn’t perform the “perfectly safe” underground tests within French borders, Chirac reportedly claimed that they were “holding them in France” (8), referring to French Polynesia’s status as an overseas territory. Johnson does not quote directly here, so the precise tenor of Chirac’s comment is unclear, but the sentiment reflects a broader pattern of attempts by colonizers to soften perceptions of the control they wield. The Limited Nuclear Test Ban permitted underground testing so long as it did not allow “radioactive debris to be present outside the territorial limits of the State under whose jurisdiction or control such explosion is conducted” (“Test Ban Treaty (1963)”), thus domesticating the penetrative nature of underground testing and equating colonizer/colonized relationships to the patriarchal nuclear family. A refraction of this domestication appears in U.S. public safety narratives throughout the

cold war. The mandated values of the nuclear family and private property were operationalized in what Roy calls “the propaganda campaign to convince the American people that they could survive a nuclear war” (63). As American families were encouraged to install underground shelters in their backyards, President Dwight D. Eisenhower emphasized that this “policy is based *firmly* on the philosophy of the obligation of each property-owner to provide protection on his own premises” (qtd. in Roy 65; italics original). In a continuation of the bikini’s “domestication of military technology” (Teaiwa 101), the invasive and destructive act of underground nuclear testing is confined to a heteronormative and thoroughly Eurocentric private sphere in an attempt to shield it from critique. In this way, the nuclear colonial powers assume that, through their own perceived “mastery” of nature, they can impose Eurocentric cultural norms onto the realm of the underground and manipulate it into serving their interests without the interference of geological forces out of their control.

SECTION III: Terrestrial Tides

In order to illuminate the plurality and variability of *Black Rainbow*'s underground, I employ Barbadian poet Kamau Brathwaite's tidalectics, an oceanic lens which attends to cyclical dynamics and fluidity even in unexpected places like the lithosphere. Brathwaite developed tidalectics as a decolonial approach to theorizing cultural processes that disrupts the linearity of Hegel's dialectics: "I am now more interested in the movement of the water backwards and forwards as a kind of cyclic... motion" (Brathwaite qtd. in Mackey 14). While the thesis-antithesis-synthesis structure of Hegelian dialectics is suggestive of a pendulum swinging on a fixed, two-dimensional plane, Brathwaite's concept centers the more abstract "rhythmic fluidity of water" (Hessler 31). Scholars have previously invoked Brathwaite's concept in Pacific Island contexts. For example, in *Routes and Roots: Navigating Caribbean and Pacific Island Literatures*, Elizabeth DeLoughrey suggests that the theory of tidalectics possesses the appropriate dynamism to move between two regions that are typically kept separate in academic discourse. "Turning to the sea," DeLoughrey writes, "we destabilize the myth of island isolation and open up new possibilities for engaging a dynamic history of time-space" (*Routes and Roots* 20). Where DeLoughrey navigates across man-made geopolitical and topographical boundaries, I focus specifically on disrupting a perceived duality between land and water, which is exemplary of the colonial "denial of overlap" between dichotomized concepts (Plumwood 50). By "heeding both difference and continuity" (Plumwood 3), I analyze the specifically terrestrial tides within the lithosphere represented in *Black Rainbow*. Even as Wendt's novel defamiliarizes well-understood concepts, it consistently withholds the possibility of a finite interpretation, instead embracing multiple meanings; this effect is particularly prominent in the intermingling and alternating facets of *Black Rainbow*'s underground spaces. In their study of transgender

representation in literature by Mā'ohi author Chantal Spitz, Eric Disbro cites Brathwaite and highlights “oscillation” as a tactic of tidalectic analysis (58). Following their insight, I employ an oscillating viewpoint to reveal the cyclical movement between specificity and expansiveness, and hegemony and resistance, in Wendt’s undergrounds.

Brathwaite encapsulates tidalectics with a poetic image of an elderly woman sweeping sand away from her cliff-side home and appearing to “[walk] on the water” (*ConVERSations* 33). The framework of tidalectics mirrors “the movement of the ocean she’s walking on, coming from one continent/continuum, touching another, and then receding” (*ConVERSations* 34). Brathwaite’s poetry in *Rights of Passage* emphasizes the enmeshment of tidal dynamics with land. In “South,” Brathwaite opens with the “shores” by which he “was born” and depicts oceanic qualities seeping into the land and into him: “life heaved and breathed in me then / with the strength of that turbulent soil” (“South” 57). What does it mean for soil to be imbued with the turbulence of the tides? Brathwaite demonstrates that the rhythms associated with the ocean are not confined to that space; they interact with people and land and become expressed in newly specific ways across realms that Eurocentric epistemes might seek to separate. As Susan Y. Najita explains, colonial thinking is not only land-centric, but mainland-centric. The concept of the “‘mainland’ receives its boundedness via its difference from small, discontinuous bodies— islands and peninsulas—as well as from fluid, shifting ones—the sea” (Najita 5). But tidalectic analysis helps to show that qualities associated with the sea persist throughout the continents, challenging the colonial imagination’s naturalization of tidal qualities as a metric of marginality. Brathwaite also considers the inland river. Initially it seems a pale facsimile of the seawater he craves, but then the river reveals itself as a crucial carriageway to the coast: “your patientest

flowing...to the sea” (Brathwaite, “South” 57). Tidalectics enable fluid thinking along with a recognition of the continuity of oceanic dynamics throughout the geosphere.

Even in its terra-centricity, colonial logic reduces the earth that comprises continental landforms to a mere shadow of itself. By denying soil’s propagative and rhythmic traits, these ideologies naturalize geopolitical centrality as an unalterable state, and this perception helps to uphold the authority of the metropole. Challenging the two-dimensionality of Western understandings of land contributes to a tidalectic project that “[dissolves] purportedly terrestrial modes of thinking and living” (Hessler 31) and illuminates “the complex and shifting entanglement between sea and land, diaspora and indigeneity, and routes and roots” (DeLoughrey *Routes and Roots* 2). These dualities are entrenched in the rationale behind nuclear testing and can’t be dismantled with simple inversions of value (Plumwood 3). Decolonial scholars demonstrate the interconnectivity of, not only Oceania itself (Hau’ofa 32-33), but also terrestrial and oceanic forms. Similarly, tidalectics deconstructs the perceived dichotomy of what is under or above ground. Nuclear tests are conducted at between 200 and 800 meters below the surface (BBC), but the notion of the subterranean encompasses much greater and lesser depths: while a nuclear device may be buried at 800 meters below, a seed may be buried mere centimeters into the soil. Distinctions between these depths are highly contingent: over time, parts of the planet’s crust, weathered by contact with the atmosphere, break down and mingle with other organic matter (Lewis). With rock continuously cycling into soil, the ground is always tidal. In recognizing the continuity between layers of the lithosphere, I understand all of Wendt’s depictions of soil, caves, and bunkers as expressions of the same “underground” space, and therefore as attesting to the connectivity between core and crust, subterranean and surface, interior and exterior.

The first representation of soil in Wendt's *Black Rainbow* establishes the multidimensional register at which the subterranean operates in the novel. Before leaving for his quest, the protagonist decides to "[dig] up...the garden" (Wendt 35). In his narration of this task, he emphasizes the rich blackness of the dirt: "The spade's sharp head crunched cleanly into the black earth...Black water seeped out of each cut like blood. I remembered the Polynesian⁶ word for earth and blood was the same: *eleele*" (35, italics original). Wendt's employment of the Samoan word *ele'ele*⁷ highlights the way that the lifecycles and interchange of the soil's microbiomes are reminiscent of the human circulatory system and in fact directly support the health of humans and ecosystems. A similar signaling of life's connectivity to land is present in *te reo Māori*: the word *whenua* means both land and placenta (Moorfield, "whenua n.1., n.5."). Additionally, the "black" soil functions to foreground the volcanic nature of the region. Volcanoes vividly express the tidal dynamism of landforms, as they cycle gradually through the phases of active, dormant, and extinct and dramatically alter the landscape with their eruptions. "Lava is the first form of earth/life," Wendt has said. "It comes from the fiery heart of the earth and solidifies into magnificent black matter, then it breaks up into the most fertile soil in the world" (qtd. in Sarti 211). In addition to being ecologically and geologically generative, blackness—as invoked in the novel's title, the lithograph for which it is named, and the soil of Aotearoa—overflows with conceptual and creative potential. Hotere was known for his use of the color black in his artworks; nearly two decades before *Black Rainbow*, *Mururoa*, he gained renown for the seven-panel *Black Painting* [1968], which Lucinda Bennett reflects on thusly:

⁶ Throughout "Towards a Post-Native Aiga," DeLoughrey discusses Wendt's linguistic construction of a Pan-Polynesian Indigenous solidarity in *Black Rainbow*.

⁷ Okenaisa Fauolo has referenced the use of *ele'ele* to signify both blood and soil in Samoan (Herrmann & Keene).

Despite the suite's title, in the flesh these paintings barely seem black. Spectral forms like pale stretch marks or auras float across and beneath their unruffled surfaces. When squinting into the silky dark, you can barely decipher what is a smudge, what is a beam of light, and what is a reflection. Made up of hard lines and edges though they are, these are soft paintings, ghostly, like photo negatives. The works proffer a new understanding of black, of why Hotere and so many other painters...were so bewitched by its glow.

In this description, Bennett attempts to capture the abundance simmering within Hotere's pieces, but they escape definitive description, shown by Bennett's use of "barely" as she endeavors to label what could be emerging from within the black. This description could be read as symptomatic of the limitations placed on the color black in the Eurocentric imagination—what Wendt describes as "racist meanings" that include "evil, ignorance, fear, superstition" (qtd. in Sarti 212). It is telling that Bennett's articulations of the paintings' nuances are aligned with the realm of the non-living: these elements are "[s]pectral...ghostly." Nevertheless, Bennett recognizes their "soft" and "bewitching" qualities, too. Hotere's use of black "glow[s]" (Bennett) with the presence of the full color spectrum, realized as a space of creation, just like "the darkness between [Rangi and Papa's⁸] embracing bodies...[in which] their children are conceived and raised" (Wendt qtd. in Sarti 212).

Teresa Shewry contends that "we might understand the blackening of the rainbow to evoke not only the violence of nuclear weapons but also the creativity that emerged or survived" (163). Correspondingly, I suggest that the volcanic *ele'ele* signifies a similar generativity emerging from within the constraints of colonialism and containment. In its productive multiplicity, the blackness of *ele'ele* evokes the "pan-Polynesian" concept of *Pō* (Warren 1). As

⁸ The figures known in Māori belief systems to be responsible for the genesis of the world (Warren 4).

defined by Joyce Pualani Warren, “Pō is the darkness, a chaotic yet generative space from which life emerges.” (Warren 1). Pō and soil, however, should not be collapsed as concepts. Pō is “imagined as a vortex, spiraled and expansive” (Warren 1), and is too complex to be analogized to one specific earthly substance, but thinking *with* Pō can help to illuminate refractions of its qualities within the darkness of healthy, nutrient-rich soil: generativity, complexity, liminality. A colonial view of soil renders these refractions unimaginable. In Warren’s explanation of Pō’s manifestations, she connects its “temporal and spatial expansiveness” to tidal motion (2). If colonial modernity requires nature to be “inert” (Alaimo 2) and depends upon a linear dialectic to explain the world, then in contrast, tidalectics disrupt linearity and make room to recognize “creative chaos” (Brathwaite, *ConVERSations* 34), both deep within the earth and elsewhere, that is fundamentally antithetical to Western notions of scientific systematicity. “Natural scientists,” Ruth Hubbard asserts, “attain their objectivity by looking upon nature (including other people) in small chunks and as isolated objects” (11). In the context of underground testing, then, nuclear colonial powers perceived themselves as observing the apocalyptic potential of nuclear weapons, in supposedly sterile and unchanging earthen chambers, on islands-cum-laboratories that were conceived of as literal “biological and geographical isolate[s]” (DeLoughrey “The Myth” 168). Brathwaite’s tidalectics and Wendt’s *Black Rainbow*, however, expose the fallacious grounding of such programs.

SECTION IV: Nuclear Temporalities

Brathwaite's reference to the river's "patientest flowing" reminds us that tidal rhythms exceed Eurocentric temporal scales ("South" 57). The Tribunal in *Black Rainbow* attempts to impose a universalized perception of a thoroughly settler-centric "ever-moving present" with no acknowledgement of history (189). In an interview with Antonella Sarti, Wendt discusses the decolonial possibilities that arise when an "ever-moving present" is understood to mean that "the future is past; we look to our ancestors...to guide our lives...it's a holistic, ecological view of life" (qtd. in Sarti 210). Understanding the overlapping interrelations of past, present, and future clarifies the interrelations between human beings, plant and animal species, climate, and geology. Wendt's incorporation of ancestry into this holistic time-scape "prevents any slide into mystical relativism or postmodern indeterminacy" (Sharrad 220), in direct contrast to the way that Western understandings of the present, those which I suggest are at play in the Tribunal's conception of an "ever-moving present," tend to presume its inherent untethering from other periods. In these reflections, Wendt speaks directly to the shortsightedness of that assumption, but also to the way that Eurocentricity itself can be skirted by embracing the context- and culture-dependent nature of denotation. When the lithosphere is regarded through a lens that transcends the timeframes naturalized in the Western historical record, what comes to the fore is the unfolding of the present upon a planet that has always been and continues to be brought into existence by dramatic volcanic eruptions, gradual processes of erosion, and the flowing movement of continents and tectonic plates across millennia.

One of this essay's epigraphs is taken from the poem with which Brathwaite opens his article "Caribbean Man in Space and Time," wherein he follows tidalectics across these lengthy time frames to show that "the pressure and passage of lava, storm, stone, earthquake, / crack,

coral” are as central to the archipelago as the ocean waves themselves. Karin Amimoto Ingersoll draws a similar conclusion by analyzing Kanaka Maoli relationships to the ocean in her book *Waves of Knowing: A Seascape Epistemology*. “Geologically,” she contends, “all Pacific Islands were born up out of the sea, linking the land to the ocean physically, genealogically, and metaphorically” (Ingersoll 8). Braithwaite’s reflections on his “Mother Poem” are especially generative for considering the atolls that feature so prominently in Oceania’s seascapes and the histories of nuclear testing that have taken place among, above, and underneath them. In *ConVERSations with Nathaniel Mackey*, Brathwaite recalls “Mother Poem” as depicting “the social world that she created – sl- / owly slowly ever so slowly – like the polyp” (51). France’s tests were conducted at the coral atolls of Moruroa and Fangataufa, most frequently under collapsed volcanic craters that are themselves subaqueous (Directorate of Intelligence 1). Shimmering lagoons and delicate curves of coral coastline make atolls a liminal space where delineations between sea and land are blurred. The coral-driven formation process of atolls has motivated ongoing scientific debate (Droxler & Jorjy 538-542), and Brathwaite’s poetry demonstrates an awareness of the enigmatic forms of labor by which coral polyps take in seaborne nutrients and create land. Brathwaite centers the extended temporality of terrestrial movement and challenges an anthropocentric understanding of nature as a stagnant realm awaiting discovery and development by *humanitas*.

By unsettling this anthropocentric perspective, a tidalectic view of the underground also brings a new valence to anti-nuclear critique. The 1963 Limited Nuclear Test Ban Treaty forbade underwater, atmospheric, and outer space nuclear weapons testing (“Test Ban Treaty [1963]”). In doing so, it relegated the underground to a separate category from the other sites; even as they were forced to admit their inability to control nuclear fallout aboveground, the nuclear testing

powers continued to insist that the subterranean realm remained within their full control, functioning as a storehouse that would insulate society from radioactive particulates forever. Geological history disputes this notion, however, and contests the reasoning of nuclear proponents like the Atomic Energy Commission's former Acting Chairman James T. Ramey. In a 1969 rebuttal to an article in *Environment*, Ramey argues that underground testing prevents human exposure to fallout and produces no serious ecological consequences. He references testing in Nevada, monitoring techniques, and the established standards of acceptable exposure to support his contentions (34-35). This argumentative strategy seems myopic when placed in conversation with deep time. In "Deep Geological Disposal and Radioactive Time: Beckett, Bowen, Nirex and Onkalo," literary scholar Adam Piette argues that the increasing sophistication of radiometric dating methods undermined the cultural arguments attempting to present the underground as a safe container for and shelter from potential nuclear fallout. Throughout the Cold War, Piette explains, scientists were learning that "[t]he decay of radioactive elements could give a measure of the extraordinary timescales of rock formation and age" (105). This discovery increased public awareness of the "unimaginably long" afterlives of radioactivity (110) and haunted the Cold War imagination: "The deep time of the earth dated by radioactive elements and their half-life decay links as if by chain reaction to the sequence of fission, fallout, contamination and the killing of the nuclear subject" (Piette 106). As research into radiometric dating progressed, the irreversibility of the effects of nuclear testing came into clearer focus and exposed the dangers of a weapons development and testing program predicated on the "master model." Geological tides clarify "a terminal futurity that is at once without limit...and absolutely the final terminus" (Piette 106), and render the AEC's focus on the immediate consequences of underground nuclear testing inadequate. The mid-century discovery of radioactive interference in

New York stemming from tests conducted in Nevada precipitated a reckoning with the temporal and spatial range of radioactivity (Piette 106).

Black Rainbow mirrors this situation, with the city of Auckland hinting at its radioactivity despite being over 4000 kilometers from Moruroa and Fangataufa. Julia Boyd references illumination “radiating...from the city itself” in Wendt’s novel (Boyd 673-674), and during the protagonist’s quest, he finds himself escaping a dire situation through a labyrinthine cave where “[a] greenish glow emanated from the walls” (Wendt 91). This mysterious radiance is reminiscent of the luminous green used to signify nuclear contamination in popular culture. Gabriele Schwab cites a 1990 episode of *The Simpsons* entitled “Two Cars in Every Garage and Three Eyes on Every Fish” as demonstrating the conceptual link between radioactivity and mutation (ix-xi), but this episode also makes a representational link between glowing, green substances and nuclear radiation. At the local nuclear power plant, a viscous, chartreuse liquid indicates uncontained radioactive material, and an inspection of the site ends with the characters standing calf-deep in this illuminated material (00:04:25). Situating a “greenish glow” in a “wet and muddy” cave therefore suggests that the soil of Aotearoa is connected to the irradiated land of French Polynesia (Wendt 91). The invisible movement of radioactivity across vast distances refutes the notion that land is impervious to the dispersion of nuclear energy, or that human agents could develop technology to make it so.

As the protagonist navigates them, the underground tunnels seem passive; they are sculpted by and for human beings. “All labyrinths were designed by people,” he thinks, an idea which comforts him in its suggestion that he can unravel its human-made mysteries. The protagonist sees the earthen tunnels as serving him by “[lighting his] way” with the unnatural green glow and providing a potential avenue for escape (Wendt 91). This moment is part of the

novel's oscillation between endorsing and challenging colonial attitudes towards nature. Sawyer and Agrawal note that lands subject to European colonization were seen as lying in wait of "European religion, reason, and technology" (80) through which these locales could be "mastered," as Plumwood might put it. The protagonist's initial confidence in navigating the cave fits with this ideology. However, this interpretation is swiftly undermined by contradictory elements in Wendt's text. As Sawyer and Agrawal point out, the racialization of the land and the individual upon it makes a profound difference to the way each are viewed in the colonial imagination, with the conquering of nature reserved for "a white, largely male elite" (Plumwood 23). At this stage in the novel, the protagonist is not yet fully conscious of his Indigeneity, but moments later, his would-be captors—known as "the hunters" (Wendt 42)—describe him as a "savage" (Wendt 98). As DeLoughrey has explained, the references to the protagonist's "savagery" throughout the novel illustrate the endurance of colonialism, as the protagonist "is continually monitored for native 'reversion'" (*Routes and Roots* 208). Positioning an Indigenous man as the agent exploiting nature's resources challenges "tropes of ecological indigeneity" (Adamson 31) and unsettles the dualism dividing Western culture and Indigeneity-as-nature.

SECTION V: The Tantalizing Terror of Generativity

In his always-partial absorption into the Tribunal's society, the protagonist embodies the ambivalent position of the colonial subject as defined by Homi Bhabha. The colonizing power, according to Bhabha, is haunted by "colonial ambivalence" because it is both entranced by the possibility of successfully subjugating those it colonizes and horrified at the prospect of people it thinks of as inferior successfully meeting Eurocentric standards of full humanity; the authority of the colonial power depends on an unsealed chasm between colonizer and colonized existing in perpetuity (Bhabha 126-127). As a result, the colonial psyche always possesses the "desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as *a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite*" (Bhabha 126; italics original), because without being able to recognize the other, it's impossible to effectively subjugate them. The novel begins at the moment when the Tribunal, in response to the protagonist's near-seamless "mimicry" of settler norms, must "intensif[y] surveillance" to keep the protagonist's otherness recognizable (Bhabha 126). In the opening pages, the protagonist seems almost entirely assimilated into the Tribunal's "ever-moving present" (189). He unquestioningly attends his "dehistorying" proceedings every day. In fact, it is Margaret, his wife, who shows signs of resistance to the Tribunal, referring to Maungakiekie Obelisk as one expression of the Pākehā's attempted erasure of Indigenous life in Aotearoa (Wendt 12). But the protagonist is undeterred in his loyalty to the Tribunal even after his wife disappears from their home and he is told not to "worry about her" (Wendt 20). "Whatever...the Tribunal told me, I believed" he reflects, "...I felt no loss" (Wendt 20). His emotional immunity to her absence illustrates his absolute adherence to the norms of an Aotearoa where the Tribunal is looked to as the ultimate authority. Initially, it seems as if the Tribunal is pleased with this demonstration of assimilation, as they declare him to have successfully completed the "prescribed process of

Dehistorying,” and bestow upon him the privileged designation of “the ideal citizen of our State.” The Tribunal’s declaration concludes by stating “he is now of Us, forever” (Wendt 33). Despite the supposed freedom of his new position, the Tribunal immediately places a new hurdle before the protagonist, requiring him to undertake a dangerous quest to be reunited with his family (34), during which he will be pursued doggedly by “hunters” (42). This, I propose, is the Tribunal’s attempt to de-assimilate the protagonist just enough that he remains a “reformed” but still “recognizable Other” (Bhabha 126). They were forced to deploy this strategy after his wife’s expressions of displeasure with the Tribunal—which we later learn were scripted (Wendt 179)—fail to produce the necessary slippage in the protagonist’s identity. The evident problem of colonialism’s requirement for the marginalized to remain “recognizable” is that the very points of contrast that insure the colonizer’s power also contain the means by which that authority can be threatened. That is, as long as the colonizer can recognize the difference of those they subjugate, so too can colonial subjects possess an awareness of the inferior position assigned to them. From this differentiated position, they can also observe, critique, and resist the worldview imposed by the colonizer. This is the threatening space which Bhabha describes as being “between mimicry and mockery” (127). Thus, the protagonist only begins to resist the Tribunal when he is awakened to the repressive structure he lives within by their very attempt to insure his continued subjugation.

The ever-present threat posed by the subjectivity of the colonized connects colonial ambivalence to *nuclear* ambivalence. Both colonialism and nuclear proliferation produce inexorable hazards of annihilation that lurk outside of the hegemon’s control. Sawyer and Agrawal state that “European intrigue with its feminized/racialized other was half-conceived through fascination and fear” (80), and nuclear proliferation can be read similarly, with the

knowledge of the ungovernability of the earth's crust, nuclear energy itself, and the will of the colonized driving the desire to master all three. Understandings of nuclear ambivalence interact with but do not precisely mirror Bhabha's colonial ambivalence. Teaiwa regards nuclear ambivalence as being characterized by a "celebration" of the sense of dominance these weapons offer to the state along with a "forgetting" of the unspeakable horrors nuclear proliferation all but promises (87). "Remainderless destruction" on the other hand, is the concept undergirding Gabriele Schwab's understanding of the "deeply ambivalent apocalyptic imaginary of nuclear war" (48). Schwab focuses on how the subjectivity of the nuclear *public* handles this dilemma, and she particularly emphasizes the need to confront the notion of society's erasure without becoming attached to Edenic visions of "the disaster zone as an idyll of freedom" (47).

For the purposes of interpreting *Black Rainbow*, however, I would like to bring Teaiwa's focus on the nuclear power structure to bear on Schwab's concept of "remainderless destruction" (49) in order to recognize the collision of colonial and nuclear ambivalences expressed by the Tribunal. For the nuclear colonial powers, reckoning with "remainderless destruction" is not an option, because their identity is dependent upon their ability to subjugate and intimidate the other; this explains why mutually-assured destruction was (and remains) such a tenacious norm, even as it responds to vehement opposition with half-hearted gestures towards disarmament. The only viable path for the nuclear powers that preserves their hegemony is to deny the threat at hand and to double-down on the status quo. This dynamic is made apparent in nuclear testing powers' choice to ignore criticisms of underground nuclear testing, and, analogously, in the way that *Black Rainbow*'s Tribunal tacitly accepts the continued presence of the "Tangata Moni" beneath Aotearoa's cities. The President in the novel is aware of "Tangata Moni" communities all throughout Aotearoa, but the Tribunal elects to "leave them alone" as long as they don't pose

a direct threat to the system (Wendt 223). On an individual level, however, the President demonstrates a different attitude: since finishing university, he has been fascinated by the “True Ones,” and his career has been devoted to developing new methods of “reordinarinising” that might succeed in “‘crack[ing] the uncrackable ten per cent’” (Wendt 223-4). The protagonist was, for a time, the President’s proudest achievement, and he even identified him as his “son” (Wendt 227). The gripping concoction of “fascination and fear” articulated by Sawyer and Agrawal was experienced by the President in the past when, after several “reversions,” the protagonist once again seems successfully “reordinarinise[d]” (Wendt 227-8). Despite this supposedly being a triumph for the President, he “miss[es]” the “tricks, energy, rebellion, primitiveness” of the protagonist’s previous selves (Wendt 228). Therefore, by taking up residence in the wild realm of the underground *and* by always remaining unpredictable to the Tribunal, the “True Ones” come to stand in for nuclear weapons themselves. Just as the nuclear colonial powers were willing to risk everything for the chance to master the mushroom cloud, the President’s dream of developing a fully effective “reordinarinising” technique motivates him to tolerate the ongoing presence of the “True Ones”—even to accept being murdered by the protagonist (Wendt 256). Such contradictory choices are necessary to simultaneously refute and fixate on the generativity within this underground space and the spectacular threat posed by testing nuclear weapons within it.

Wendt’s choice to locate the “Tangata Moni” sanctuaries underground is something of an inversion of the novel’s figurative references to nuclearization, as it literalizes the usually metaphoric use of the underground as generic signifier for resistance. The whare of the “True Ones” is directly under the city center of Auckland, and upon entering it for the first time, the protagonist reflects upon the significance of its location, remembering the “centuries-old

genealogy, in literature and film, of persecuted groups and minorities going underground to survive. Underground, they organized resistance to the powers above ground” (Wendt 156-7). DeLoughrey, in her close reading of this moment, remarks that “Wendt indigenizes the underground trope of Ralph Ellison’s work” (*Routes and Roots* 221), combining the context of North America with “transpacific...genealogies” (*Routes and Roots* 222). In the historical record, the underground’s association with political resistance functions mostly at the level of metaphor; Terrance Weik warns against the temptation to overemphasize actual tunnels in archeological research on the Underground Railroad, stating that “underground areas were often not the main mode of concealment” (91), while David Gilbert, when writing of his experiences in the Weather Underground movement, most associates his “underground” existence with disguising his true identity (157-8). But in *Black Rainbow*, the use of the underground as a discursive tool is made real, not only for the “True Ones” that the protagonist has come to know, but for other “Tangata Moni” across the country (Wendt 158, 225). The “True Ones” attain trans-temporal and trans-spatial significance by positioning themselves within a varied lineage of resistance and responding to the evolution of the settler state by adapting anew the discursive connection between resistance and underground space.

Where erasure and omission are the guiding principles of the above-ground realm occupied by the Tribunal, communication is the key mode of dissent for the “True Ones.” “Reclaiming a voice in [the research] context,” Linda Tuhiwai Smith argues, is “about reclaiming, reconnecting and reordering those ways of knowing which were submerged, hidden or driven underground” (79). These concealed knowledges are embodied by the “True Ones,” as their oratory practices trace the contours of memories and discourses that have been forcibly confined to the nation’s unconscious. The protagonist’s quest ultimately centers on uncovering

these truths for himself and learning from the “Tangata Moni” community. It is in the underground where his companions recount forbidden memories and teach him about the “otherworlder oppression and arrogance” through which “the Tangata Maori...were nearly all erased, physically and culturally” (Wendt 157-158). Rebecca Hogue contends that their storytelling resembles Fāgogo, an “improvisational” Samoan form that challenges the settler colonial state’s erasures (329-331). The primary storyteller in the whare is Aeto, and his narrations of traumatic experiences contest the “otherworlders’” insistence on their settler society as unencumbered by history or guilt.

The emergence of these traumatic histories underground suggests the setting’s ambivalent function as the unconscious of Aotearoa. The specific relationship between the underground and the unconscious is contingent on whether it is understood through a nuclear colonial or tidalectic lens, and the “True Ones’” underground existence is situated directly within this rupture. The idea of the unconscious is crucial to Schwab’s understanding of “nuclear subjectivities,” as she argues that “trauma-induced defenses relegate unbearable and overwhelming aspects of nuclear encounters to the unconscious...at both the individual and the collective levels” (xiii). In Lorenzo Veracini’s estimation, similar “defensive formations” occur when the settler colonial “fantasy” inevitably encounters friction from resistant Indigenous subjects (365). The settler’s aversion to acknowledging their violence and complicity (Hisatake 83-84) is akin to the “unbearable and overwhelming” nature of nuclear truths (Schwab xiii). Given these intense drives to suppress uncomfortable realities, it benefits the colonial imaginary to consider the earth’s and the psyche’s interiors as impenetrable crypts. However, “hauntings” prove the inadequacy of colonial attempts to permanently suppress anxiety and shame (Schwab 44). In recounting truths unassimilable to the “otherworlders” from within their underground safehouse,

the “True Ones” embody the “hauntology” that afflicts “otherworlder” society (Schwab 44). In their continuing survival in the face of “reordinarinising,” the “True Ones” share with nuclear weapons a “deadly vibrancy” and “threatening longevity” (Schwab 44) always seeping beyond the boundaries within which they are intended to be contained.

Just as the nuclear testing powers deny the mobile and porous qualities of the underground in order to naturalize it as a container for nuclear detonation, the Tribunal acts like the “True Ones” resistance is effectively contained in their sanctuaries. A tidalectic understanding of the relationality between elements of the ecosphere explains the inevitable bubbling up of this uncontrollable, un-erasable generativity. Just as rocky elements of the lithosphere mingle with and co-constitute the soil covering the earth’s surface, the “True Ones” will always evade the Tribunal’s attempts to confine them. Erin Suzuki elucidates the “inextricable entanglement of...neoliberal projects from the chaotic and unpredictable crises that they purport to solve or prevent” (12-13), and the novel illustrates this enmeshment in the figure of the President, who states plainly that they “can’t allow reversions,” even as he knows that reversions are consistently taking place (Wendt 230). In the face of the “vibrancy” and “longevity” (Schwab 44) of “Tangata Moni” communities, the President’s comment reads like Ramey’s insistence that, based on short-term human-made metrics, underground nuclear testing can be proven to cause no ill effects (34-35). The Tribunal can’t stop reversions just because they may manage to suppress them for a period of time; the timescale of resistant Indigenous vitality exceeds colonial periodization.

If colonial norms of history and narrative privilege “objectivity” as supposedly secured through interpretative “distance” (L. Smith 63), then Aeto’s “uncertain, always-qualifying, ever-questioning retelling” (Wendt 237) directly challenges these assumptions and attests to the

capacious possibilities of “alternative histories” and “alternative knowledges” (L. Smith 38). Aeto consistently requests that the listening “True Ones” refrain from asking him to clarify information that the story “doesn’t say” (Wendt 236). Aeto tells his listeners, “we’re getting bogged down...in our search for certainty. Enough to accept here that everything is uncertain, build that into our telling, so we can get on with the story” (Wendt 236). Initially, the instruction “don’t ask” could seem like a foreclosure, but the novel’s investment in ambiguity suggests otherwise. When a gap appears in a narrative, Wendt implores us to dig deeper *ourselves*, to find the meaning within our own engagement with the story. As Schwab argues, hauntings are “material and immaterial, invisible, mobile, and invasive” (44), and different readings will illuminate different shades of their multifaceted composition. The vacillating, interpersonal form of meaning-making modeled by Aeto imitates the tidalectic way of “coming from one continent/continuum, touching another, and then receding” (Brathwaite, *ConVERSations* 34). Aeto’s storytelling exemplifies, in its variable interpretations, the centrality of tidal movement to the True Ones’ resistance, and, in parallel, to the underground itself.

The protagonist and his wife are only briefly reunited in the novel, at which moment he realizes that her critiques of the Tribunal were mere play-acting, and that in fact she remains a loyal subject. Nevertheless, the protagonist’s memories of her attest to the oppositional, oceanic qualities of land, femininity, and Indigeneity. The Tribunal selected Margaret to be the protagonist’s wife, but he can’t fully reconcile this explanation with his experiences with his wife, insisting that “our love for one another had not been a fabrication, a pre-programmed feature” (Wendt 192). From the beginning of their relationship, she has displayed an innately subversive vitality. Early in their relationship and in contravention of the Tribunal’s attempted erasure of Indigeneity, denial of settler violence, and outlawing of native subjectivity, the

protagonist's wife points out that they are both "'brown'" (Wendt 193). A linear explanation is insufficient to explain their marriage, and Wendt connects Margaret to the cadences of the planet's interior: her movements are "in tune with the earth's beat" (194), as is the ticking of the lithograph. Immediately prior to the protagonist's arrest by the Tribunal, he decides to "read the Hotere clock once more" before burying it in the earth on top of Maungakiekie, while "it tick[s] vigorously" (Wendt 243). The lithograph's unending ticking is placed in conversation with the enduring Indigenous presence on Maungakiekie, itself an ancient landform, emphasizing that "[g]eological timescales map on to the terminal time of the nuclear" (Piette 106). Here, Wendt's alignment of Indigenous people with the land elucidates the settler hubris that positions *both* Indigenous resistance and nuclear fallout as forces that can be contained and ultimately forgotten. *Black Rainbow* suggests that "the nuclear threat...can never be fully experienced" (Schwab xiv) within the colonial culture that produced it because of the irreconcilability of the underground's Pō-like qualities with the normalization of underground nuclear testing. Before disappearing, the protagonist's wife took the lithograph to the summit of Maungakiekie (Wendt 18-19), and the protagonist now recognizes this act as "link[ing] us again to the earth and our Dead" (Wendt 242). Colonial logics seek to collapse his wife, the land, and Indigeneity into equivalence and invisibility, but he mirrors his wife's actions and reaffirms their shared vitality and the ever-present threat they pose to the forces that try to subjugate them.

CODA

The forbidden memories recounted by the “True Ones” in the underground whare can be compared to the resistant potential of Pō as represented in volcanic soil. “The possibilities” of these unfinished stories are left unresolved, and the protagonist states: “I could spend my life exploring [them], or, the story itself could, like water trying to find its level, explore all its possibilities in me” (Wendt 238). With this image, the story, the teller, and the listener interact tidalectically: they flow into and reshape one another. As Wendt’s protagonist watches the sunrise on Maungakiekie immediately prior to his arrest, he observes that “[t]he blood of the sky coned to anchor the atua⁹ of volcanoes to the sea” (242), affirming the life force within landforms and the common ground that rock and soil share with more observably mobile elements of the ecosphere. An insistence on humanity’s mastery of an objectified lithosphere was central to the justification of underground nuclear testing in the late Cold War period; even as all other sites were considered out of bounds, the underground’s image as merely a lifeless stage for human exploits preserved its acceptability as a detonation site. Albert Wendt’s *Black Rainbow* critiques this ideology without capitulating to its terms. In colonial ideology, femininity, Indigeneity, and land have been tied together, and each has been used as evidence for the supposedly “natural” subjugation of the others. My tidalectic reading of the novel does not seek to detach these concepts fundamentally from one another, but rather to think more expansively about the dynamism of trans-corporeality suppressed in colonial and nuclear discourses.

The (literally) shifting states of the ground rebuke the dualistic perspectives which would categorize land as straightforwardly solid and confine tidal qualities to the oceans. *Black*

⁹ John C. Moorfield’s *Te Aka: Māori Dictionary* defines atua as referring to a “supernatural being.” Sometimes used to mean god, atua can also be “regarded as ancestors with influence over particular domains” (“atua, n.1.”).

Rainbow's rebels and their undergrounds threaten persistent perceptions of the legitimacy of these and other dichotomies. By highlighting the complexity in Wendt's representation of nuclear-inflected soil and the "True Ones," it is possible to bring into focus the generative chaos and trans-corporeal relationality that suffuse the earth's crust and the role that various forms of ambivalence play in propagating the colonial viewpoints attempting to elide these earthen qualities. Recognizing the rebellious formations that persevere even when colonizing knowledges attempt to bury them (L. Smith 79) enables a critique of late Cold War nuclear ideology and its ongoing reverberations. By transcending simplistic linear timeframes and anthropocentric topographical categories, the manifestations of past, present, and future underground defiance in Wendt's *Black Rainbow* expose the narrow views of history and temporality that settler hubris depends upon and thus attempts to present as indisputable. The resistant ecological relations experienced by the novel's protagonist are imbued with a vitality that endures across time and space; as a result, *Black Rainbow*'s depictions of underground resistance contain critical insights for our efforts to confront continuing crises of climate change, global capitalism, and neo-colonialism.

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