The Aesthetics of Oceanic Kinship in Climate Change Poetry and Activism

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Introduction

In our current historical moment, a deep sense of ecological crisis has generated a strong desire for different ways of relating to and with the natural world (Huggan and Tiffin 5–7). Activists, artists, and ecocritics alike criticize extractivist approaches that treat the environment as a mere resource "for the taking" and thereby "devaloriz[e]," as Macarena Gómez-Barris puts it, "the hidden worlds that form the nexus of human and nonhuman multiplicity" (5). Simultaneously, many people across the globe are searching and advocating for other forms of being in and with the more-than-human world. In this article, I consider how the notion of more-than-human kinship has become a highly productive and versatile trope in the artistic and activist quest for re-imagining human and nonhuman collectivity and agency.

This trope, I argue, provides an important complement to other forms of environmentalist discourse. Critical debates about the Anthropocene, for instance, have often emphasized the destruction that humans collectively wreak on the planet through anthropogenic green-house gas emissions (Crutzen and Stoermer). This framework has been criticized, among other things, for its totalizing conception of the human, which glosses over the logics and processes through which only some members of the species have driven ecological ruin, often to the detriment of others. Eve Tuck and Wayne Yang, for instance, have argued that anthropocentrism is deeply ingrained in settler colonialism. They write that "[t]he settler, if known by his actions and how he justifies them, sees himself as holding dominion over the earth and its flora and fauna." Thereby, certain (human) subjects are considered "more human, more deserving than other groups or species" (6). From this perspective, the ecological disasters of the "Anthropocene" are closely linked with dominant notions of what it means to be a human agent on this planet.

Racialized settler colonial logics also pervade certain forms of environmentalism and ecological governance. What Aimee Bahng calls "settler environmentalism"

denotes an approach that aims to protect "the environment" at the same time as it sees it "as something to be measured, contained, regulated, and [...] governed." Settler environmentalism "arises out of Euro-American notions of private property and Enlightenment Man as superior to nonhuman animals as well as other humans racially construed to be premodern and therefore unable to comprehend and hold the reins of self-governance" (48). The Indigenous philosopher and environmental theorist Kyle Powys Whyte (Potawatomi) thus argues that dominant responses to climate change are governed by a "crisis epistemology." By highlighting the crisis' perceived urgency and unprecedentedness, this epistemology justifies the perpetuation of settler colonialism through climate action (Whyte, "Against Crisis Epistemology" 55).

The language of ecological kinship, in contrast, helps register the agency of members of the nonhuman world at the same time as it provides impulses for a different notion of human agency that comes with obligations of care, stewardship, and reciprocity to the more-than-human. Such notions of ecological kinship, I will show, are often shaped by the material and metaphorical valences of water. As watery paradigms, logics, and aesthetics help throw into relief the interconnectedness of human and more-than-human bodies across time and place, they help recalibrate the meanings and implications of collective agency. More specifically, this article engages the widely viewed and discussed 2018 video poem "Rise," which resulted from a collaboration among the performance poets and climate activists Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner and Aka Niviâna with the international grassroots organization 350.org. Aiming to make visible Indigenous islander perspectives and to appeal to global audiences at the same time, the video develops a multiscalar language and aesthetics of kinship. This language is rooted in, celebrates, and adapts specific, place-based Indigenous notions of human and nonhuman kinship and interweaves them with an imaginary of transoceanic and trans-Indigenous sisterhood. By doing so, it frames its critique of fossil capitalism within an alternative notion of collective agency. While the video poem does not necessarily offer a full-fledged environmental ethics, I suggest that the language of kinship can help make legible and center Indigenous cosmologies and onto-epistemologies. It thus puts pressure on the ecological imagination, which has too often been shaped by settler colonial paradigms.

Kinship, Ecology, Water

The idiom of kinship is widely used in the scholarship on relationality and belonging among humans and, increasingly, between humans and the more-than-human world. Since the 1980s, the field of kinship studies has shifted its focus away from the nuclear family and towards a wider range of "affiliations, affinities, and belong-

ings" (Fackler and Schultermandl 197). Today, kinship is no longer understood as a linear and static biological relationship. Rather, the term registers complex social practices that involve a deep sense of mutuality. David Schneider's phrase "*doing* kinship" frames kinship as a cultural practice. For Marshall Sahlins, kinship is defined by a "mutuality of being" among "people who are intrinsic to one another's existence" (28). This mutuality of being "encompasses practices of mutual care which emerge from an understanding of interdependence, collectivity, and affiliation" (Fackler and Schultermandl 197). The nuclear family ideology, in turn, has come under intense scrutiny for its implication in processes of colonization and ecological exploitation. Mark Rifkin, for instance, demonstrates how linear and heteropatriarchal notions of family, in connection with the logics of private property, have served "as a key technology of settler imperialism" (24). By imposing nuclear family logics onto Indigenous people and lands, laws such as the Dawes Allotment Act helped further Indigenous erasure at the same time as they made land available for capitalist extraction.

Kinship, however, can also be part of an anti-imperial critical vocabulary when Native people use it to name and describe their own social formations as they differ from the privatized domesticity imposed by the liberal state. Mark Rifkin thus argues that "kinship" can serve as a "threshold concept" or "matrix of translation" that makes legible sociopolitical structures that are otherwise erased (15–17). Scholarship in Indigenous studies and Indigenous ecocriticism often honors Indigenous cosmologies that are founded on a sense of multispecies kinship extending far beyond the human (see LaDuke). Sometimes, such approaches run the risk of evoking the stereotype of the "noble savage" by simplifying the diversity and adaptability of Indigenous ways of being, thinking, and feeling (Tallbear 50). Settler scholars in particular need to be mindful of the fact that they cannot and should not fully access Indigenous "analytics and practices of existence" (Povinelli 6). Accordingly, this article does not aim to make claims about Indigenous onto-epistemologies. Rather, it observes how the language of kinship has acquired a mediating function in transnational environmentalist discourse, as Indigenous and non-Indigenous artists and thinkers have used it to make visible and legible, mostly to non-Indigenous audiences, forms of being in and with the world that exceed and resist the paradigms of extractive capitalism.

The language of kinship thus helps propel a move away from settler-capitalist understandings of the environment as a resource or inanimate object. Understanding the nonhuman as deeply entangled with human belonging, well-being, and survival, the idiom of kinship expands notions of collective agency beyond the human. Animals, bodies of water, or other elements of the natural world are often seen as relatives or ancestors that have enabled the current generations' existence and that, for the sake of future generations, must be honored, respected, and cared for. The recognition of kinship, Gavin van Horn writes, involves "a respect for the agency of

other beings and concerted efforts to treat them with dignity and even deference" (6). For Anja Kanngieser and Zoe Todd, drawing on Métis philosophies, "it is clear that lands, waters, and atmospheres in what is currently known as Canada and North America are agential beings understood through complex forms of interrelatedness and kinship with humans; they have histories that extend far beyond human existence" (389). In other words, agency is not understood as a prerogative of humans. Rather, the nonhuman world, too, consists of "agential beings." And such a more comprehensive understanding of agency is foundational to the ways in which humans collectively interact with the world that surrounds them.

In a 2018 piece on "Settler Colonialism, Ecology, and Environmental Injustice," Kyle Whyte provides one example of how the idiom of kinship can serve a mediating function between specific Indigenous ways of living and scholarly discourse in the environmental humanities. He defines the notion of Anishinaabe "collective continuance" as based on three concepts: "(1) interdependent relationships (or interdependence), (2) systems of responsibilities, and (3) migration" (126). In Anishinaabe traditions, Whyte explains, "reciprocity or mutuality between humans and the environment [are] a central feature of existence" (128). In contrast to the "'toxic relationship' that humans entertain with the planet through" extractive capitalism (Germanaz et al. 15), humans are to encounter the nonhuman world on eye-level, with feelings of care and responsibility that involve not just taking but also giving. According to Whyte,

> [r]eciprocity is understood through the gift-giving and -receiving relationship in which each party has a special contribution to make. But to become a party in a relationship, one must be transformed into a relative with reciprocal obligations, and transformation often occurs through ceremonies and other formal activities. Anishinaabe kinship relationships connected, via reciprocal responsibilities, humans with other humans, humans with nonhumans, whether spirits, plants, animals, or elements (e.g., water) and humans with particular places. ("Settler Colonialism" 131)

In other words, Whyte highlights how, in Anishinaabe culture, kinship responsibilities are systematized and coordinated through intricate, wide-ranging, and situated sets of practices and institutions. Such practices and institutions, Whyte emphasizes, are not immutable but have a high capacity for adaptation and for fostering resilience. With the notion of kinship, Whyte thus gestures towards a specific affective language of reciprocity, mutuality, and care that otherwise remains illegible to dominant, speciated, gendered, and racialized Western thought. Importantly, this language does not suggest full access to or knowledge of Anishinaabe lifeways.

Such Indigenous notions of kinship have deeply shaped conceptual thought in the environmental humanities. After years of working with Aboriginal peoples, Aus-

tralian-based ethnographer Debora Bird Rose suggested "the kinship mode" as a way of thinking about the ways in which life and survival on Earth are always already entangled. After all, Rose argues with Gregory Bateson, "the unit of survival is not the individual or the species, but is the organism-and-its-environment." The kinship mode therefore "situates us here on Earth, and asserts that [...] we are at home where our kind of life (Earth life) came into being, and we are members of entangled generations of Earth life, generations that succeed each other in time and place" (Rose 64; van Dooren and Chrulew).[1]

Donna Haraway's *Staying with the Trouble*, in turn, adapts the language of kinship to her idea of survival and thriving in a climate-changed world where long-standing relations have been ruptured through various forms of migration. She points out, with Anna Tsing, that climate change and the increasing pressures on ecosystems lead to the disappearance of refuges where human and nonhuman critters "sustain reworlding in rich cultural and biological diversity" (100). Our only hope to cope with the current crisis is to make "oddkin," i.e. "making kin non-biogenetically" ("Staying" 103), "by cultivating a sense of accountability and 'response-ability' beyond such too-often naturalized categories of gender, sex, race, nation, reproduction, or species" (*Staying* 28). "Oddkinship," according to Haraway, can lead us out of the Anthropocene into a time and place where refuges are replenished. What Haraway calls the "Chthulucene" is defined by "intense commitment and collaborative work and play with other terrans, flourishing for rich multispecies assemblages that include people" (*Staying* 101):

> "Kin" means cultivating response-ability for each other, whether one wants to or not. I have a relative; a relative has me. Let us recognize relatives as fast and well as "we" can. Let us start with welcoming refugees into innovative, robust, enduring, multigenerational kindreds in places where "we" live, cobbling together the needed home-making, city-making, and region-making practices. (Haraway, "Staying" 104)

While there are significant differences between Whyte's and Haraway's notions of kinship, they both posit our current ecological crises as entangled with dominant forms of collectivity and notions of collective agency. While the "idea of 'collective agency'" predominantly used in Western scholarship, "remains haunted by the

1 As Anja Kanngieser and Zoe Todd point out, the kinship mode also has important implications for scholarly research. Scholars "need to recognize and respect relationships imbricated through human interactions with specific places." They therefore caution against the classic academic "case study" that seeks to abstract and universalize. Instead, they advocate "kin studies," by which they mean a process of attunement that respects boundaries and first and foremost asks how to be good kin. In their words, kin studies "is a practice of accepting what you don't know and attending to what you are invited to know in more sensitive ways" (392).

framework of individualism" (Knewitz, in this volume, 24), the idiom of kinship not only puts into question the primacy of the human individual and the heteropatriarchal family. It also provides pathways toward re-imagining what collective agency can and should be in a more-than-human world.

This language of kinship, I argue, also has considerable confluences with the recent turn towards the oceans and water in the humanities. While many disciplines in the humanities have long been dominated by land-based concepts and paradigms, the Blue Humanities ask how basic assumptions may shift once we center the presence and force of the oceans and water more broadly (Blum; DeLoughrey, "The Oceanic Turn"; DeLoughrey, "Toward a Critical"; Howard; Oppermann; Mentz). By doing so, the Blue Humanities help us rethink landed concepts, including kinship. Thereby, land and ocean are not considered binary opposites. As archipelagic American studies and island studies scholars, such as Michelle Stephens and Brian Russell Roberts or Epeli Hau'ofa, have established, the land and the sea are inherently connected. The oceans' materiality is marked by fluidity, by incessant mobility, by constant mingling, and by circular moves rather than teleological linearity. As such, they have the potential to materially and metaphorically dissolve land-based notions of autonomous enclosed private property, passed on along vertical kinship lines, or autonomous individual personhood and agency.

In their recent volume on *Indigenous Pacific Islander Eco-Literatures*, Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner, Leora Kava, and Craig Santos Perez draw a direct connection between the place that water holds in Pacific Islander cultures and ecological ethics founded on principles of kinship. They state that an "ethics of movement and connection" derives "from our relationships to water, which we hold from our ancestral stories to the ways water lives in our everyday lives. Our waterways behave, adapt, and change in ways that teach us definitions of connection, kinship, and responsibility." They use the example of nuclear pollution and of the Nuclear Free and Independent Pacific movement to illustrate how water demands an ethics of connection rather than separation or enclosure. According to them, these ecological crises throw into relief the fact that "what happens to one part of our ocean affects all parts of our ocean. What happens to one part of our body affects all parts of our body" (Jetñil-Kijiner et al. 59).

In this, their position resonates with the aqueous posthumanism of philosophers Astrida Neimanis and Stacey Alaimo. They, too, highlight the myriad connections among human and nonhuman bodies of water. In Neimanis' words, "we leak and seethe, our borders always vulnerable to rupture and renegotiation. [...] Our wet matters are in constant process of intake, transformation, and exchange—drinking, peeing, sweating, sponging, weeping. Discrete individualism is a rather dry, if convenient, myth" (2). Considered from such a watery perspective, human bodies can hardly be imagined as separate from one another or the natural environment. Rather, the "flow and flush of waters" not only sustain individuals' bodies "but also

connect them to other bodies, to other worlds beyond our human selves" (2). Accordingly, Alaimo suggests that stories of humans' material connection with the ocean, such as Rachel Carson's *The Sea Around Us*, may "provoke a rich ethical sense of kinship between humans and other animals" as they embed human physiology in the ocean. They assert that humans "slosh […] around with the rest of oceanic life […] at the level of the gene," and "the sea surges through the bodies of all terrestrial animals, including humans—in our blood, skeletons, and cellular protoplasm" (116–25). From this angle, discreet individualism and purely *human* agency emerge as phantasies that in no way reflect that material realities in which our bodies are embedded.

"Rise": Climate Change, Poetry, and Transnational Activism

The idiom of oceanic kinship has made its way into climate change activism and poetry, such as the 2018 video poem "Rise." The video is the result of a collaboration between two performance poets and activists, Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner and Aka Niviâna, and the grassroots climate organization 350.org, which funded and launched the video for its global Rise for Climate campaign. Jetñil-Kijiner was born in the Republic of the Marshall Islands. Like many Marshall Islanders, she grew up in Hawai'i and was partly educated in California. She gained international attention when she opened the 2014 UN Climate Summit in New York with her poem "Dear Matefele Peinem" and she has been a prominent advocate of the Pacific Islands in the global climate and anti-nuclear movements. In 2017, she published her first poetry collection, titled *Iep Jāltok: Poems from a Marshallese Daughter*. Aka Niviâna grew up in a small town at the northern coast of Kalaallit Nunaat, Greenland. She is now based in Nuuk, the capital of Greenland, where she works on environmental issues as well as in various capacities in the creative industry ("Artist Profile"). Niviâna was introduced to Jetñil-Kijiner by glaciologist Jason Box after speaking at a climate protest in Copenhagen in 2018 (Faris 78). Together, they went on a "poetry expedition" to Greenland, accompanied by film makers Dan Lin, Nick Stone, Rob Lau, and Oz Go ("Rise").

350.org is an international environmentalist organization that seeks to end the use of fossil fuels. Using art, literature, and social media to appeal to a transnational audience, its campaigns bring together diverse grassroots activists and groups across the globe. Thereby, the organization serves as what Caroline Levine calls a "network of networks." It "acts as a hinge, encouraging, training, and linking local divestment groups as they build their own campaigns, and then sharing accumulated lessons and contacts with all new groups that emerge" (Levine 137).[2] By doing so, the organization operates in a field of tensions between a wide range of discourses, cultures, and ways of feeling. Climate change is a planetary problem,

2 I am grateful to Caroline Levine for sharing the unpublished book manuscript.

but its local meanings and implications, along with the capacities for mitigation and adaptation, vary greatly. 350.org aims to provide a platform for the experiences of frontline communities that are facing the worst effects of the climate crisis while having contributed least the least emissions. It also aims to appeal to diverse global audiences, most urgently to those people who are leading greenhouse gas-intensive lifestyles.

Jaimey Hamilton Faris has thus described the organization as an "'eco-cosmopolitan' [...] platform" (77). Eco-cosmopolitanism or world citizenship, according to Ursula Heise, is both an imperative and a challenge. The planetary scales of the current ecological crises require us to "envision [...] ecologically based advocacy [...] formulated in terms that are premised no longer on ties to local places but on ties to territories and systems that are understood to encompass the planet as a whole" (10). Yet, in their attempts to speak to "global" audiences, cultural representations of climate change have often resorted to and adapted age-old simplifying, colonial tropes. The colonial impulses residing in certain environmentalist discourses have particularly affected the representation of people living on Pacific Islands, who are often depicted as exotic, voiceless victims helplessly drowning in a rising ocean. Elizabeth DeLoughrey describes the essentializing and de-historicizing representations of Pacific Islanders that circulate in environmentalist films as a kind of "salvage environmentalism" whose critique of American petrocapitalism is based on a rendition of "Pacific Islanders as the harbingers of climate change," "as figures of an isolated, natural and nature-loving culture" (189). This mode of representation not only erases the individual and collective agency that Pacific Islanders have displayed in the struggle against climate change. It also shrouds viewers' own complicity and agency in climate-warming practices (191).

Faris argues that 350.org, in its attempt to speak to a global problem by lending visibility to local and Indigenous experiences and perspectives, "at times essentialises specific local environmental concerns, plays into exoticising tropes of [...] 'frontline' communities, while also enabling connections across translocal groups" (Faris 77; Heise). In a video on the making of "Rise," Jetñil-Kijiner relates that the original framework proposed by 350.org would have only her traveling to Greenland, but she felt uneasy representing someone else's homelands and asked to include an Inuk Indigenous artist ("Rise"). The result of her collaboration with Niviâna, in turn, is a performance of transoceanic kinship that speaks back against colonial tropes not only by centering Indigenous women and epistemologies but also by adapting and inserting them into the language of global climate change activism. In the process, they develop a multiscalar language and aesthetics of kinship that interweaves different models of and responses to collective agency.[3] Climate change emerges as

3 On the poetics of weaving in Jetñil-Kijiner's poetry, see Sipahi.

not only a problem of fossil fuel consumption but as a crisis of connection and care woven into (settler) colonialism and extractive capitalism.

The Aesthetics of Oceanic Kinship in "Rise"

Jetñil-Kijiner and Niviâna dedicate the first third of their poem to a performance of what Faris calls "Indigenous transoceanic solidarity" (76) and a "feminist hydro-ontological perspective" (78). They perform a kind of sisterhood that centers Indigenous women and that is founded on shared principles of reciprocity, mutuality, and kinship with land and water. The video opens with a panoramic view of the ocean, accompanied by a cello track. In contrast to Romantic nature imagery or touristic ads, the viewers are not looking down onto the scenery from a high angle that suggests mastery and control. Rather they are positioned at the level of Jetñil-Kijiner's feet, on eye-level with the sea and its ever-moving ebb and flow. Jetñil-Kijiner opens the poem by addressing Niviâna in verses that perform transoceanic connection at the same time as they emphasize rootedness: "Sister of ice and snow, / I'm coming to you / from the land of my ancestors, / from atolls, sunken volcanoes—undersea descent / of sleeping giants." The camera then shows a close-up of Greenlandic glacier ice whose colors resonate with the color of the Marshallese sea and Jetñil-Kijiner's dress, as Niviâna responds: "Sister of ocean and sand / I welcome you / to the land of my ancestors / —to the land where they sacrificed their lives / to make mine possible / —to the land / of survivors." The following stanza again uses parallelisms and references to "land," "ancestors," and water, as the Marshall Islands are described as "a country more sea than land" and Greenland as "the biggest island on earth."

Next, the two poets affirm their bond by performing a ceremonial exchange of gifts and traditional stories. Jetñil-Kijiner brings shells from the Bikini Atoll and Runit Dome, along with a traditional Marshallese story about two sisters "frozen in time on the island of Ujae." One of the sisters "magically turned into stone," leading the other to choose the same fate in order "to be rooted by her sister's side." Now they stand by the edge of the reef as two rocks, teaching people "a lesson in permanence" to this very day. Niviâna then offers stones picked from the shores of Nuuk, telling the story of Sassuma Arnaa, the "Mother of the Sea, who lives in a cave at the bottom of the ocean." Whales, streams, and icebergs are her children, whom she wants to see respected and treated well. Sassuma Arnaa watches over humans' feelings and behaviors towards oceanic beings, and she "sees the greed in our hearts/ the disrespect in our eyes." "When we disrespect them," Niviâna says, "she gives us what we deserve, / a lesson in respect." In other words, Sassuma Arnaa, the "guardian of the sea," has the powers to hedge in humans' collective agency.

These first scenes, along with the poets' paralleling verses, evoke a range of forms and genres of kinship. First, the poets anchor their sisterhood in their connected-

ness with their own home islands as places of multigenerational and multispecies belonging and nurturance. By sharing these stories and gifts, the two poets evoke their own specific Indigenous cosmologies and local forms of belonging among humans and nonhumans on the Marshall Islands and Greenland. The meaning of these stories within their respective oral cultures and their implications for their practices of existence remains beyond my purview as a non-Indigenous scholar. My focus is on the cultural work that these stories do in the context of transnational climate-change activism. By sharing them right at the outset of the video, I suggest, Jetñil-Kijiner and Niviâna frame their demand for climate change mitigation within Indigenous practices and worldviews. The combination of (performance) poetry, film, music, and storytelling allows them to inscribe Indigenous presence and agency onto the dominant environmentalist images of exotic Pacific Islands and melting glaciers. In contrast to dominant representations, which "rarely ma[k]e [such places] meaningful on their own" (Hobart 3), Jetñil-Kijiner and Niviâna's video performance begins to reclaim the sight of these lands and waters for and into Indigenous worldviews, yet without suggesting that viewers can or should fully access Indigenous epistemologies. The two poets thus not only share these stories with each other, they also offer the video's viewers an opportunity to begin to engage with specific Indigenous analytics of existence that posit crucial alternatives to both capitalist extractivism and settler environmentalism (Whyte, "Settler Colonialism"; Bahng 48–49).

As the poets insist in their first verses that their lives have been made possible by human and nonhuman "ancestors," they situate their own physical and spiritual existence within a temporality that far exceeds the lifespan, or agency, of the human individual. The term "ancestors," taken from Indigenous cultures and transferred into the language of global climate change poetry, thus references an imaginary of kinship in which the individual emerges from a multi-generational, multi-species collectivity, a dense web of life to which they also have obligations as ancestors of future generations. Whereas definitions of the environment as a resource under settler capitalism tend to operate within the short-term temporalities of individuals' or corporations' profit accumulation (Moore), the language of kinship insists that the function and value of the more-than-human world are neither limited to one generation nor to the paradigms of investment and profitability.[4] Clearly, the natural world is much more than a resource to be extracted. In other words, the video poem here begins its reasoning with an Indigenous onto-epistemology of place that posits ways of knowing and being as co-constituted by—and yet not limited to—specific environments.

Both stories shared by the poets display strong continuities between the human and the more-than-human worlds as well as between the land and the sea.

4 For a recent critique of the economist logics of current climate and environmental governance see Buller.

In the Marshallese story, rocks in the water possess a human history and identity that makes them ancestors and role models. Rather than individual advancement or (human) agency, the second sister chooses turning to stone for the sake of maintaining the communal bonds with her sibling. In other words, she uses her individual agency to choose collectivity. Notably, this form of collectivity and belonging crosses the boundary between what Western thought defines as the human and the inanimate. As a consequence, "inanimate" rocks emerge as more than objects or resources. Representing a deep sense of connectedness with and rootedness in the land and the water, they become teachers for future generations.[5] Niviâna's story, in turn, imagines the sea as a powerful mother who reminds listeners of their responsibilities across species boundaries. Caring for and respecting the nonhuman world is a mandate whose disregard will have consequences. In other words, humans' collective agency is to be guided by principles of ecological kinship among humans and nonhumans. If these are not heeded, natural elements, as animate, agential forces, will enforce limits on human agency.

By sharing these stories, Jetñil-Kijiner and Niviâna invite their viewers to immerse themselves in these storyworlds and their structures of feeling, which resonate, among others, with a language of animacy. Robin Wall Kimmerer has pointed out how the Potawatomi and most other Indigenous languages display what she calls a "grammar of animacy." When, for instance, pronouns do not distinguish between human and more-than-human agents and when verbs dominate over nouns, she writes, "[t]he language reminds us, in every sentence, of our kinship with all of the animate world" (56).[6] Whereas the English language draws clear lines between human actors and nonhuman objects, many Indigenous languages "use the same words to address the living world as we use for our family. Because they are our family" (55). The stories that Jetñil-Kijiner and Niviâna share may have been translated into English, but they both model ways of engaging the more-than-human world as agential forces that powerfully shape human lives and that deserve care and respect.

5 On animacies, also see Chen.

6 Kimmerer notes that seventy percent of Potawatomi words are verbs, compared to only thirty percent in the English language (55). Such basic grammatical structures, she argues, create a tendency towards objectifying the natural world in English while the Potawatomi language helps its speakers register the "unseen energies that animate everything" (49). As she writes: "A bay is a noun only if water is dead. When bay is a noun, it is defined by humans, trapped between its shores and contained by the word. But the verb *wiikwegamaa*—to be a bay—releases the water from bondage and lets it live. 'To be a bay' holds the wonder that, for this moment, the living water has decided to shelter itself between these shores, conversing with cedar roots and a flock of baby mergansers. Because it could do otherwise—become a stream or an ocean or a waterfall, and there are verbs for that, too. To be a hill, to be a sandy beach, to be a Saturday, all are possible verbs in a world where everything is alive" (55).

By doing so, "Rise" resists what Elizabeth Povinelli calls the geontopower of the liberal settler state. "Geontopower" denotes "a set of discourse, affects, and tactics" that "shape the coming relationship of the distinction between Life and Nonlife" (4). This means that the liberal state routinely attributes to colonized people an "inability [...] to differentiate the kinds of things that have agency, subjectivity, and intentionality" (5). Logics that do not adhere to the dominant geontological regime are marked as premodern or otherwise different. Through its vibrant visual and poetic language of kinship, "Rise" presents a persuasive alternative to geontological imaginaries.

The video poem's filmic structure similarly evokes notions of mutuality, reciprocity, and kinship. The language of sisterhood, the visit, and the exchange of gifts are equivocated by a steady back-and-forth of alternating scenes from the Marshall Islands and Kallaalit Nunaat. Different shades of blue in the sea and the ice, along with the organic shapes of the landscapes, resonate with one another, suggesting profound interconnections and a respectful encounter between the two sisters as well as the lands and the waters they belong to. As Faris points out, the opening verses establish not only the bond between the two poets but also a hydrological connection between "ice and snow" and "ocean and sand" (85). Just like Neimanis's aqueous bodies, their bodies, fates, and cultures are linked by ocean water.

Both examples throw into relief how (Indigenous) storytelling can serve vital social and emotional functions by steering formations of collective agency away from settler onto-epistemologies and toward alternative meanings, geographies, and relationalities. Mishuana Goeman argues that "Native stories extend beyond a beautiful aesthetic and simple moral or fable." Rather, "Native people hold the power to rethink the way we engage with territory, with our relationships to one another, and with other Native nations and settler nations. And it is our stories that will lead the way as they have for generations." Stories thus can develop their own kind of agency by guiding and transforming forms of being-in-common with the human and the more-than-human world. Goeman points out that "stories" does not necessarily have to refer to Native "stories from time immemorial." Contemporary Indigenous cultural practices can acquire similar meanings and functions, in particular when they tend "in a single breath or word to recall hundreds, even thousands of years back by employing community, personal, and historical stories in intertextual moments" which gesture beyond the relationships mapped out by the settler state (Goeman 39–40; Robinson 324). Jetñil-Kijiner and Niviâna's "Rise" may well be considered such an "intertextual moment." As it interweaves references to traditional Indigenous oral storytelling with the language of contemporary climate change activism, the video poem articulates notions of community in a multigenerational, transoceanic web of life.

The two protagonists of the video poem thus do not meet as autonomous individuals but they come endowed with a culture and history that is entangled with multispecies relatives and place. This by no means involves an essentializing

notion of static, "Othered" Indigenous culture. On the contrary, on the homepage of 350.org, in a subsection titled "The Process of the Poem: Selecting the Legend," Jetñil-Kijiner relates a process of curation and creative adaptation. Her point of departure is not Marshallese cosmology that she is already familiar with but Niviâna telling her that "her legend would focus on a powerful woman of the sea." When Jetñil-Kijiner asked Marshallese elders at the Customary Language and Law Commission in Majuro about legends of powerful women, "they said they didn't know of any." Yet, luckily, she receives "a packet of legends transcribed by Marshallese teachers. They are in Marshallese, which she reads much more slowly than English, but eventually she finds two stories and discusses their meaning and their possible links with the Greenlandic stories, via Skype, while en route to Greenland, with their respective transcribers. This video thus presents Jetñil-Kijiner not as the passive carrier of an unchanging Indigenous culture but rather as an agential Indigenous woman who makes conscious use of Indigenous traditions by selecting certain elements of her culture that seem helpful to the current moment and adapting them to a global, twenty-first century context. In other words, while Pacific Islanders may often be cast as immobile, passive victims of climate change, Jetñil-Kijiner highlights mobility, collaboration, female agency, and active processes of transfer, translation, and adaptation. Along these lines, Jetñil-Kijiner and Niviâna's performance of transoceanic Indigenous sisterhood is constituted not through essentializing logics of biology and lineage but through a creative collage of oral storytelling, ritual, poetry, and activism.

The second third of the video poem adds another dimension to the performance of trans-Indigenous sisterhood: a shared sense of vulnerability to colonialism and climate change.[7] The poem's mood, along with the cello music, gets more somber as the two poets present their grievances to each other. Again centering island perspectives, their verses combine a performance of care and mutual listening across oceans with an activist stance demanding political and social change: "From one island to another / I ask for solutions. / From one island to another / I ask for your problems." Niviâna first mentions "the melting ice" and "the hungry polar bears." Jetñil-Kijiner then references "the tide / that comes for us faster / than we'd like to admit. […] forcing us to imagine / turning ourselves to stone." As the two poets speak in turns to describe existential threats caused by climate change, the camera moves back and forth between the Marshall Islands and Greenland, alternating close-ups of sea water and ice, panorama shots of both islands, and longer, portrait-like images of smiling islanders. On the one hand, this sequence of scenes highlights the fact that the melting ice of one poet's home will flood the other's, destroying the lifeways and livelihoods of both. On the other hand, close-ups on the faces of proud, smiling

7 On trans-Indigeneity, see Allen and Somerville.

islanders, many of them children, emphasize their embodied presence, their liveliness, and their will to survive.

Importantly, the poets articulate climate change and their own sisterhood in the longue durée of Western colonialism and militarism, which have long undermined Indigenous sovereignty and collective agency. As they do so, their performance interlaces their voices and perspectives, couching their references in affective language that highlights their emotional bond with their environments. One stanza is opened by Jetñil-Kijiner's voice stating "Sister of ice and snow, / I come to you now in grief" and continued by both chorusing "mourning landscapes / that are always forced to change." Then their voices alternate as they drop brief references to their islands' respective histories, including "wars inflicted on us" (Niviâna) and "nuclear waste / dumped / in our waters" (Jetñil-Kijiner), "on our ice" (Niviâna). Together they conclude with "and now this" as viewers see a close-up of melting glacier ice and barren rock with a receding glacier in the background.

Their islands' colonial histories may not be identical but their performance highlights their similarities and interconnections. And both claim Indigenous counterstories to dominant Western narratives of modernity which can only be sketched out here. Greenland was used as a strategic defense location by the United States in World War II. After the war, the U.S. made an agreement with Denmark that allowed them to continue military operations and, among others, go through with the so-called "Project Ice Worm." In this context, the U.S. military built and launched missiles using nuclear generators. When the project was abandoned in 1966, the nuclear waste was buried underground in the Arctic. As global warming is changing local geologies, new risks of nuclear contamination have emerged (Hobart 8–9; Faris 87). Dominant narratives have continuously linked the project of militarization with the securing and spread of Western democracy and freedom, which have often been associated with an American way of life embodied by nuclear, heteropatriarchal families and settler notions of domesticity (Hobart 7–9). Yet, from an Indigenous perspective, these projects have meant recurring and ever-changing forms and layers of settler colonialism that threaten Indigenous lifeways along with multispecies health and survival.

Parts of the Marshall Islands, in turn, were used by the U.S. as a laboratory for nuclear tests. Told that their removal would serve "the good of mankind and to end all world wars" (Teaiwa 89), inhabitants of the Bikini and Ānewetak Atolls were coerced into leaving their land with false promises of a speedy return and a higher purpose. Those who stayed were often not protected against the fallout of the over forty atomic bombs launched between 1948 and 1958 (Rust). The nuclear waste was sealed in the so-called Runit Dome. Named the "Tomb" by locals, it is built atop an unlined crater left by a nuclear bomb in porous lime stone. Many locals, researchers, and Marshallese officials have expressed concern that nuclear waste may still be seeping into the Pacific. In some areas, researchers have measured radiation levels that "ri-

val those found near Chernobyl and Fukushima" and Marshall Islanders have experienced severe and ongoing health crises, including high rates of cancer, miscarriage, deformations, and thyroid disorders (Rust; Hobart 10; Faris 85). Long struggles with the U.S. government for full acknowledgment of the environmental damage along with the settlement of health and property claims, have eroded trust between both countries.[8] More recently, it has become known that, from 1968 onward, the United States used the islands as a test ground for conventional and bioweapons (Rust). The harms that nuclear pollution has inflicted on Marshall Islanders are an instance of what Rob Nixon calls "slow violence," which is a kind of violence that does not occur all at once but gradually, "dispersed across time and space," so that it is often not recognized as violence at all (2).

It is only after establishing the connections between each other, their home-islands, and their colonial histories that Niviâna and Jetñil-Kijiner launch their critique of carbon capitalism. They turn from the "we" of transoceanic connection and sisterhood to "colonizing monsters" that threaten their lifeways and livelihoods. These monsters, they continue, "to this day devour our lives / for their pleasure." And they "now decide, / who should live / and who should die." This figurative language avoids blaming specific subjects or groups of people. Rather, the "monsters" and "beasts" draw attention to biopolitical regimes that violate and rupture multispecies kinship through their differential valuation of (human) life forms.

Only in the antepenultimate and the penultimate stanzas, the two performers address a "you" that is not their respective transoceanic sister but an addressee that is implicated in and aware of the lethal effects of carbon capitalism without acting. Taking turns, Jetñil-Kijiner and Niviâna state in an increasingly agitated tone: "We have years. / We have months / before you sacrifice us again / before you watch from your tv and computer screens / waiting / to see if we will still be breathing / while you do nothing." As these verses establish a connection between the vulnerability of the performers' "we" and the passivity of the "you," they throw into relief not only the addressees' agency but also their moral obligation to act. Michael Rothberg's notion of "[i]mplicated subjects" describes the complex ethical role of people whose greenhouse gas-intensive lifestyles are disproportionately responsible for climate change, thus unintentionally wreaking havoc on other people's lives. Implicated subjects "are not direct agents of harm, as perpetrators, but neither are they innocent bystanders, for they inherit, inhabit, or benefit from regimes of domination—as citizens, for example, or, perhaps, as beneficiaries" (Whitlock 496; Rothberg). As "Rise" makes these regimes of domination and their impacts visible within the previously established framework of oceanic kinship, the climate crisis emerges as a global crisis of care

8 An international tribunal established by the two countries in 1988 ruled that the United States should pay $2.3 billion in claims, but Congress and U.S. courts have refused. According to research by the *Los Angeles Times*, the U.S. has paid just $4 million (Rust).

and responsibility. The performers demand that "the world see beyond [...] their oil-slicked dreams, beyond the belief / that tomorrow will never happen." Extending the logic of reciprocity, they suggest swapping perspectives with their addressees, imagining the reversal of the global biopolitics of petro-capitalism: "Let me bring my home to yours. / Let's watch as Miami, New York, / Shanghai, Amsterdam, London, / Rio de Janeiro, and Osaka / try to breathe underwater."

In the final stanza, the poem returns to the gesture of gift-giving and re-affirms its demand to expand core elements of its logic of oceanic kinship across the globe. It posits the affective language of valuing, respecting, and caring for multispecies life as an antidote to the capitalist valuation of power and profit ("our lives matter more than their power"; "life in all forms demands / the same respect we all give to money") and it again highlights the interconnectedness of all life forms across the globe ("these issues affect each and everyone of us / None of us is immune"). Eventually, the poem infuses its call to action with oceanic language, as Jetñil-Kijiner and Niviâna state: "each and everyone of us has to decide / if we/ will / rise." The titular and closing "rise" gestures toward a hydro-ontological connection between protesting human bodies and bodies of water. Protesters are not rising against the ocean, which settler logics would frame as a natural force that may be controlled and contained. Rather, "rising" suggests a sense of unity and of joining forces with the ocean. Protesters emerge not as individual or collective human agents but as agents that have recognized their role in the more-than-human world and act as part of an ecological collectivity.

Conclusion: Kinship, Collectivity, Agency

In her book on *Kānaka Maoli* (Indigenous Hawaiian) cartographies of abundance, Candace Fujikane posits Indigenous notions of multispecies kinship at the heart of a "profound epistemological shift" needed in order to secure "a planetary future." "Indigenous ancestral knowledges," she writes, "are now providing a foundation for our work against climate change, one based on what I refer to as Indigenous economies of abundance—as opposed to capitalist economies of scarcity. Rather than seeing climate change as apocalyptic, we can see that climate change is bringing about the demise of capital, making way for Indigenous lifeways that center familial relationships with the earth and elemental forms" (Fujikane 3). As I hope to have shown, Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner and Aka Niviâna's video performance "Rise" makes the idea of multispecies kinship resonate at different scales in climate change activism and poetry. In this respect, I suggest, the video poem presents an (Indigenous-centered) case in point for Ursula Heise's claim that "dynamic and interactive collage or montage," which uses "the infinite possibilities of zooming into and out of local, regional, and global views," may be a particularly productive form in current representations

of climate change (11). "Rise" performatively interweaves traditional Indigenous storytelling and cultural practice with the multimedia format of online poetry performance and the rhetoric of climate change activism. By doing so, it also conjoins different traditions, forms, and affective languages of kinship, beginning with the speakers' kinship with their island worlds, expanding to a space of transoceanic sisterhood between the Marshall Islands and Greenland, and then venturing to posit kinship logics as an alternative to extractive carbon capitalism and as a framework for reimagining climate change activism.

This expansion of Indigenous kinship logics thwarts a settler imagination that belittles and encloses islands. As Aimee Bahng has demonstrated, U.S. officials have persistently cast the islands as remote and deprived of resources, because they have failed to recognize how the Pacific constitutes a "sea of islands" (Hau'ofa) in which the oceans offer routes of connection and create abundance for Indigenous Islanders (Bahng 59). "Rise," in turn, inverts this gesture of belittlement. By interweaving various notions of kinship at different scales, it expands and adapts the language of kinship.

Evidently, these languages of kinship vary greatly, as they are more or less situated, (trans-)local, bounded, established, or formalized. And yet, as stories can model relationships and structures of feeling, "Rise" provides imaginative pathways toward an Indigenous-centered, hydro-feminist global climate change discourse. As climate change is framed as a crisis of care and responsibility in the longue durée of settler colonialism, the multiscalar language of kinship reworks not only stereotypes of islanders but also notions of human agency in the current historical moment. "Rise" holds implicated subjects accountable, demanding that they take action. However, it also suggests that climate action, and humans' capacity to effect change at large, needs to be embedded in and delineated by an awareness of the "entangled quality of life on Earth" (Rose 64), both locally and globally. As its watery aesthetics of relation defy all claims of enclosure, the poem invites its audiences to imagine agency within networks of care and responsibility across multigenerational and multispecies collectivities.

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