Conclusion: Environmental Cultures of Im/Mobility

The main argument of *Ecopoetic Place-Making* has been that it is productive to read contemporary ecopoetries of migration from the joint perspective of ecocriticism and mobility studies because the environmental imaginaries of mobility these poetries produce can shed light on some of the many complex ways in which environmental issues and human mobility are connected. In my study, I have examined how contemporary ecopoetries of migration engage in *ecopoetic place-making*, that is, in a (re-)fashioning through poetry of place-sense and place-attachment from perspectives of mobility that has socio-political and environmental significance because it calls into question the idea that long-term residence is the only way by which human beings develop meaningful relationships to the nonhuman world. Contemporary American poetry written by authors of various migratory backgrounds invested in both nature and mobility challenges reductive ecolocalist understandings of emplacement and counters exclusionary notions of belonging, including racist, nationalist, and econativist arguments about whose presence in a given place is to be considered beneficial and whose presence is considered harmful to a particular community or environment. What is more, ecopoetries of migration suggest that experiences of mobility, whether voluntary or forced, do not prevent mobile subjects from establishing emotionally intense, caring relationships to the natural world, even when bodily immersion in the natural world is not, or nor longer a viable possibility. In a world of converging ecological and mobility crises, crises that lead to a simultaneous dissolution of some borders and the strengthening of others, *Ecopoetic Place-Making* claims, we need more inclusive notions of environmental literature, more critical environmental pedagogies, and a better understanding of how we might arrive at conceptualizing and enacting more ecoethical ways of being in the world that take into consideration the perspectives of migrants and other people on the move. Reading ecopoetries of migration, I posit, can help us along the way.

Ecopoetic Place-Making in Contemporary American Ecopoetries of Migration

Examining ecopoetries of migration is important, because the mobile environmental imaginaries these poetries evoke can form the basis of more inclusive models of ecological agency, ecological citizenship, and ecological desire. It requires engaging with intersecting systems of oppression and exploitation in the United States, demonstrating how (racial) capitalism, settler colonialism, and U.S. imperialism shape human-nature relations in ways that are destructive to marginalized communities as well as to the environment, not only by allowing the devastation of some places while investing in the preservation of others, but also by preventing the movement of some people, goods, and ideas, while promoting the movement of others. If it accounts for the uneven regimes of environmental and mobility injustice produced by these systems of oppression and exploitation, reading ecopoetries of migration by Native authors as well as non-Indigenous authors, by white poets as well as by non-white poets of migration, I hope to have shown, can point to more critical forms of environmental thinking and environmental pedagogy as well as to alternative, less destructive approaches to arrivant and settler place-making.

The American landscapes featured in the works of the poets I have discussed range from the occupied territories of the U.S. Pacific over the polluted environments of Appalachia, the deeply historical landscapes of the U.S. South and the Western Plains, to the multilayered places of the Southwestern deserts and the mystifying, yet in no way less historical natural world of the Pacific coast, demonstrating the great variety of environments that migrant poets and the mobile subjects they write about engage with. When contemporary American poets of migration evoke natural environments, they do so by conceiving of places as porous formations open to various translocal, transregional, and transnational connections. The rolling grasslands of Walcott's Western Plains remind the narrator of the tropical seascapes of his native Caribbean; Etel Adnan's musings about the Pacific Ocean always also point to the Mediterranean Sea of her childhood in the Middle East; and when Agha Shahid Ali's speaker contemplates the landscapes of the Sonoran Desert during rainfall, he thinks about the Monsoons of his native Kashmir, to name just a few examples. Portrayed as complex and multilayered, the environments mentioned in the texts are characterized by their many material, social, political, cultural, and historical dimensions, whether one considers Craig Santos Perez's tidelands, which represent an endangered ecological zone as well as contested legal and cultural territory, or Juliana Spahr's rivers, whose ecosocial function as gathering places for human and nonhuman beings is disrupted or at least endangered by toxification and privatization. Where Perez's tidelands challenge dominant legalist conceptualizations of place that only account for dry land, Spahr's rivers dismantle the clear separation between human beings and the

physical world around them implicit in dominant settler notions of place and bodily self. In a different manner, the sea in Adnan's poetry and the desert in Ali's poetry appear so immense and strange, yet familiar, that they encourage more capacious notions of desire and longing as well as more radical notions of hope and belonging. At the same time, as all of the works discussed in *Ecopoetic Place-Making* show, the more-than-human environments depicted in contemporary American ecopoetries of migration often appear as complex discursive-material formations imbued with conflicting meanings, highlighting some of the ways in which N/natures and their representations "dodge our expectations and theoretical models" (Snyder v), as do im/mobilites and their representations.

Representations of N/nature in contemporary ecopoetries of migration are diverse and so are representations of mobility**.** While this study centers on speakers who have migrated to or within the contiguous United States, the texts also feature many other kinds of mobility in conjunction with these migrations. Some of the poems' speakers, such as Perez's seafarers, Walcott's and Spahr's air travelers, Ali's car drivers and walkers, and Adnan's swimmers and mountain climbers re-evaluate their own relationship to nature and position in the world in the moments in which they are moving, or kept from moving. Perez assembles many materials, voices, and stories about mobility and immobilization in order to write *from* the unincorporated territory of Guam about the environmental devastation of Guåhan, while his collections also indicate that he is speaking *from* California and consequently from a perspective of Indigenous diaspora. Juliana Spahr's migrant speakers become acutely aware of their own position of privilege as academic migrants after they have moved away from Appalachian Ohio and of their privileged position as settler migrants after they have moved to Hawai'i. Derek Walcott's narrator starts to perceive himself and the environments of his native island in larger global contexts when he returns to St. Lucia for a visit after having traveled the continental United States. Agha Shahid Ali's descriptions of the Sonoran Desert are tinged with nostalgic longing because his speaker Shahid has left the Southwest for the Northeast, while the desire for N/nature of Adnan's speaker becomes increasingly directed at places she can no longer reach as well as at future natures she will not live to see. Apart from addressing how experiences of mobility affect people's relationship to places and the more-than-human world, then, some of the texts also attest to ways in which limited access to land can impede mobility and how limited mobility can impede access to nature. Adnan's poems reflect on the increased immobility of old age, while Perez's collections denounce Chamoru immobilization in Guåhan as a result of centuries of colonization and decades of U.S. military buildup; Spahr's poems, in turn, think about the legal and physical barriers constructed to keep some people away from or confined to certain places due to their racial or class status. At the same time, both Spahr and Perez also think about the ways in which limited mobility frequently comes to coincide with a heightened exposure to the harmful effects of local

forms of environmental degradation. Such differentiations suggest that even while increased human and non-human mobilities—such as the invasion of Guåhan by tree snakes and the U.S. Military in Perez's collections, mass tourism in Walcott's epic poem *Omeros*, and the trans-corporeal mobility of toxins as well as the continental migration of settlers to Hawai'i in Spahr's texts—can mean increased environmental risk, so can a lack of mobility.

Contemporary American poetry invested in nature and mobility not only evokes *experiences* of migration and perspectives on N/nature informed by everyday mobilities, it also evokes *histories* of displacement. In general**,** the conflicted histories of those U.S.-American places the mobile speakers encounter play a crucial role in the poets' desire for (and in some cases for their attempts at establishing) meaningful relationships to their respective places of residence, however temporary they may be. Rather than conjuring wild or Edenic 'New World' environments as places of refuge from the human world, the five poets I have analyzed here depict places saturated with history, including histories of catastrophic as well as near-invisible environmental change and much -discussed as well as nearly-forgotten histories of violence and oppression. Because of the focus that poetries about nature and mobility direct at human-place, human-nature, and human-land relations, the histories of Native peoples appear as a central motif in contemporary ecopoetries of migration, often accompanied by other histories. Craig Santos Perez, for instance, evokes the variegated Chamoru histories of displacement and dispossession alongside nonhuman histories of displacement. Juliana Spahr's poetry examines the long history of U.S. imperialist occupation of, U.S. settler-migration to, and U.S. mass tourisms in Hawai'i as well as working-class displacements in place as well as between places in her poetry about Appalachia. Derek Walcott incorporates evocations of the forced relocation of enslaved people from Africa to the Caribbean and the United Sates and of Indigenous peoples from the U.S. South to reservations in the American West. Agha Shahid Ali reflects both on the migratory histories of ancient peoples of the Southwest and on the ways in which contemporary Indigenous peoples of the desert such as the Tohono O'odham continue to forge intimate connections to the land by means of land-cultivation and storytelling, despite centuries of encroachment upon their land by settlers and arrivants alike. At the same time, Ali references the colonization of the Southwest by Europeans and alludes, albeit only obliquely, to contemporary migratory movements across the Sonoran Desert and the U.S.-Mexican border that divides it.

One of the problems that contemporary American poetry about nature and mobility foregrounds is the frequent lack of material, or at least visible evidence in nature for settler-colonial and racist histories of violence and displacement, even as it points to the fact and indeed seeks to remind readers of the fact that some environments have been entirely transformed by settler culture. Although industrialization has made Appalachia one of the most polluted regions of the United States, this pol-

lution is rarely made visible, Spahr's poetry notes, and although settler-migration to and tourism on Hawai'i has completely transformed flora, fauna, and many landscapes on the archipelago, ideas of an Edenic island paradise in the Pacific create the illusion of a lush and welcoming natural world reading for the taking by anyone who visits the island chain. While place-names recall some histories of the desert, Ali's poetry asserts, time has erased all but the most minute traces of some of the previous Indigenous inhabitants of the places his speaker travels through. Similarly, in Walcott's poems, the highly regenerative natural world of the Caribbean and the U.S. South makes it seem as if the devastations inflicted on the local communities and environments by violent removal, chattel slavery, and the installation of plantation culture have healed, or were never inflicted in the first place. As the poets I read foreground those histories that nature will not tell, they also draw attention to those representational traditions that have historically contributed to the erasure of settler-colonial histories, be it the imperialist and capitalist fantasies of landscapes figured as always available for consumption (Spahr, Perez), or the pastoral myths of America as a Garden (Walcott) or sublime wilderness (Ali). On the other hand, many of the poets discussed in the present study emphasize, sometimes reluctantly, the importance of critical (Walcott) or nostalgic re-imaginings of history and memory for the creation of meaningful place-sense (Ali), future-projections for a valuable apocalyptic ethics (Adnan), of experimental poetic language as a means to make visible processes that are too small or vast (Spahr, Perez), and the creative poetic imagination more generally, where personal memories or historical records are incomplete (Walcott, Perez).

The poets analyzed in this study not only point to histories that are often forgotten, they actively counter the erasure of histories in traditional nature poetry and beyond by various poetic means: Derek Walcott modifies genre conventions in the Weldon passages as well as the passages set in the U.S. South to draw attention to the violence inherent in traditional Anglo-American (settler) modes of representation. Etel Adnan engages in an ecopoetics of disorientation to orient her readers toward the natural world, while at the same time repeatedly referencing wars that the United States are involved in. Craig Santos Perez tries to retrieve those histories that occupying forces such as the Japanese or the U.S. Military have tried to suppress by using documentary (or as I argue, participatory) modes of combining records and testimonies from various sources. Juliana Spahr too sometimes draws from external sources or works with translation machines to compose her texts. Simultaneously she engages in para-lyrical experimentations to examine the injustices perpetrated against working-class people in Appalachia and Native people in Hawai'i at the hand of (global) corporations, the tourist industry, the U.S. government, pointing to her own implication in and complicity with the harmful practices of these extra-human agents. At the same time, all the poets analyzed here rely in one way or another on highly figurative language to evoke those dimensions of human-nonhuman rela-

tions that official histories and hegemonic discourses tend to omit, even as some of them (Walcott, Spahr) remain cautious about the discourses of abstraction and universalization inherent in processes of figuration.

Contemporary American ecopoetries of migration raise questions about identity, subjectivity, community, belonging, and agency together with questions about the potential and the limits of lyrical poetry as a means of expressing the changing human-nature relations in the Anthropocene. The poems in Agha Shahid Ali's collection *A Nostalgist's Map of America* most closely resemble the traditional lyric in form and voice. When confronted with the richly layered and storied landscapes of the Sonoran Desert, Ali's migrant "poet of the desert" humbly adds his own poetic perspective on the places and cultures he encounters, forging translocal, transethnic, and transhistorical affiliations, and expressing a diasporic longing for intimacy with the world. The Weldon passages of *Omeros* revise the pastoral elegy and in doing so explore the limits of (eco)poetic witnessing, while the Dakota passages of Walcott's lyricized epic use jarring images to dramatize the narrator's (and the author's) inability to find the appropriate poetic language and form to express the vast temporal and geographical scales of the American West. In Adnan's meditations, the perceiving and thinking self remains crucial, even though the focus of attention shifts to the changing aspects of such natural phenomena as the seasons, the sea or fog. The more-than-human community evoked in her poems is one determined by a queer ecological empathy for a world of strangers, including the natural world as the strangest kin. Perez's collections, by contrast, evoke the fragile connections formed by individuals across generations and the rerouted ancestral knowledges transmitted by different cultural practices, combining lyrical with experimental sections and weaving multiple fragmented voices together to form suggestive constellations and relations. In her dis/located poems about Appalachia and Hawai'i, finally, Spahr frequently replaced individualized lyrical speakers with evocations of chemical processes or shifting collectivities of speakers, without however completely renouncing the embodied and situated perspectives and the responsibilities that come with the specific ecosocial positioning of an academic migrant and settler and the considerable ecological agency such a positioning affords the privileged anthropocene subject.

When I describe ecopoetic place-making both as a literary and a *poetic* fashioning of place-sense, I do so for three main reasons: first, because I argue that the works of poetry themselves can be read as acts of ecopoetic place-making in the context of mobility; second, because in many of the works of poetry discussed in this study, the use of meta-poetic commentary and other meta-poetic strategies draw attention to the works as text and thus to the acts of ecopoetic place-making that the poems' speakers and narrators engage in; and third, because one of the key poetic strategies the poems employ for the purpose of ecopoetic place-making is the use of intertextual references to other texts about natures and mobilities of varying scales.

These intertextual references perform different functions: in some cases, they gesture toward a similarity in poetics, such as when Perez quotes Olson, when Spahr revises Whitman, or when Adnan evokes H.D. In other cases, the intertextual references amplify the themes of migration, displacement, and longing for meaningful relationships to place, such as when Walcott references John Steinbeck or when Ali references Georgia O'Keeffe. Sometimes, they express a shared environmental sensibility, such as when Ali quotes ethno-botanist Gary Paul Nabhan, or speak to a comparable place-based, yet mobile poetic imagination, as for instance in Ali's references to Emily Dickinson's poems or the writings of Henry David Thoreau. While the intertextual references are thus at times employed to deepen the migrant poet's sense of place (Perez, Ali, Adnan), where s/he cannot fall back on long-term inhabitation of a given place, they are used in other cases to question people's desire for emplacement, whether that of settlers (Spahr) or arrivants Walcott. In all these cases, contemporary ecopoetries of migration suggest that poetry and other forms of art and literature can serve as a crucial alternative means of place-making in the context of mobility and environmental degradation.

From Ecopoetries of Migration to Environmental Cultures of Im/Mobility

In my study, I have read five poets from the joint perspective of American studies, ecocriticism, and mobility studies. Alternatively, I could have chosen contemporary American poets such as Amy Clampitt, Meena Alexander, Ed Roberson, Qwo-Li Driskill, Haryette Mullen, Myung Mi Kim, Eavan Boland, Tamiko Beyer, Aracelis Girmay, Arthur Sze, Emmy Pérez, Bill Holm, or Canadian poets of migration such as Dionne Brand or Fred Wah. Discussing poets like Joy Harjo or Ed Roberson, for example, as I have done elsewhere (Rauscher "From Planar Perspectives"), would have allowed me to explore in more detail the role of technology in mobile environmental imaginaries. Adding Harryette Mullen's poetry would have suggested a closer look at how ecopoetic place-making plays out in urban environments. An analysis of Emmy Pérez collection *With the River on Our Face* (2016), by contrast, would have thrown into relief issues concerning U.S-Mexican border ecologies, while focusing on Aracelis Girmay's book of poems *The Black Maria* (2016) would have brought to attention representations of the more-than-human world in American poetry about the Mediterranean refugee crisis. All of these poets would have provided fascinating material for analysis. Due to the form that mobilities take in some of the works of these poets and poets like them, including them would have meant expanding this study from ecopoetries of migration to ecopoetries of mobility.

Suggesting that many of the larger questions raised by contemporary American ecopoetries of migration can be asked about ecopoetries of mobility more broadly and that such an undertaking might be of interest to several different fields in the

environmental and mobility humanities is also to say that literary genres other than poetry and cultural products other than literary texts can be productively analyzed with regard to the practices of place-making they address and the environmental imaginaries of mobility they produce. In the poetic photo essay "Dole Street," included in her collection *Well Then There Now* (2011), Juliana Spahr for example wonders, like in many of her poems, how a continental migrant and settler like herself can develop a meaningful relationship to a place such as Hawai'i. She asks: "how to respect the water that is there, how not to suck it all up with my root system, how to make a syncretism that matters, how to allow fresh water to flow through it, how to acknowledge and how to change in various unpredictable ways" (49). Using imagery that describes herself as a continental transplant and indicating that poetry is not the only kind of art able to explore possible answers to these questions, Juliana Spahr ends her photo essay with a description of a performance piece by "Mudman" Kim Jones that speaks to the potential of art to envision mobile environmental imaginaries for our current times of crisis:

> The artist Kim Jones walked across Wilshire Boulevard in Los Angeles one day with a huge apparatus on his back. In the photographs of the event it is hard to tell exactly what he used to construct the apparatus but it looks like sticks and mud tied together in a loose, boxy sort of nest. It looks like the land. The apparatus appears heavy and unwieldy on him. It extends above his head and off his back by several feet. He wears some sort of mask that makes his face featureless as he walks. He is generic as he carries his apparatus. In some photographs, Jones draws a version of this apparatus over images of himself. One shows him crouching in Dong Ha Vietnam in full camouflage with the apparatus drawn on his head.
>
> Kim Jones, in carrying a heavy and unwieldy nest, on his back out in public, might have an answer.
>
> Nests draw things together and have many points of contact. They swirl into a new thing. All sorts of items end up in them. I found one the other day on Dole Street that was full of twigs and leaves and feathers and gum and plastic string.
>
> (Spahr, *Well Then* 49–50)

Kim Jones's 1976 performance is commonly interpreted as an engagement on the part of the artist with his experiences as a soldier and life as a veteran of the Vietnam War, a war that led an estimated 125 000 Vietnamese to seek refuge in the United States. As it is presented in Spahr's text, the "Mudman" performance can also be read as a commentary on the ethical responsibility of the artists to make visible to their audiences the messy materiality and mixture of natural and artificial elements used

by birds to make their nests and, one can infer, by humans to make homes for themselves in places heavy with history. Read from a joint ecocritical and mobility studies perspective, the performance further points to artistic place-making as a form of human nest-building in the context of mobility and displacement. The idea of artistic place-making as human nest-building, an idea that Craig Santos Perez also evokes in his kingfisher sequence, is intriguing because it raises questions about the function of art in the face of violence and oppression. If art builds imaginary nests or homes, who is invited in and what are people willing to do to protect these homes and against whom do they think these homes require protecting?

Rather than being tied to one location or representing a permanent place of refuge, Jones's "nest" (Spahr, *Well Then* 49) is mobile, Spahr's description of the performance notes. It is carried "in public" (50) by the artist who demonstrates his intention to shoulder his portion of the unwieldy burden of U.S. war-making by putting his own body on display. At the same time, the artist alternatively hides his identity by wearing a "mask/ that makes his face featureless as he walks" (50) and reveals his past as a soldier by integrating photographs of himself "in full camouflage" (50) into his performance. Jones's "apparatus [. . .] looks like the land" (Spahr, *Well Then* 49) but it is constructed from a mix of natural and artificial materials. Art about acts of nest-building (or as I would say, art about place-making), Spahr seems to suggest here, must address the artist's self-positioning and implication in larger structures of violence and oppression and in showing the artist's complicity shoulder at least some of the individual's responsibility of working toward a dismantling of these structures. At the same time, Spahr's reading of Jones's performance point toward what one might describe as a very human but not always ethically defensible desire to make oneself a(t) home, even when such place-/home-making entails both the beautiful and the dreadful dimensions of human beings' enmeshment with the human and the more-than-human world. Engaging with works of art that present more critical perspectives on place-making may help those of us in positions of privilege and power to find ways of stepping a little lighter and living a little less destructively on this planet and in the company of an ever-increasing number of people whose displacements, whether they are caused by conflict or environmental disasters, are at least in part our responsibility.

Being an Indigenous poet from the occupied and highly militarized territory of Guåhan, Perez's approach to evoking what I describe as environmental imaginaries of mobility in the context of converging systems of exploitation and oppression is markedly different from Spahr's and Jones's. His series *from unincorporated territory* portrays the disastrous social, political, cultural, and environmental effects of U.S. imperialism on CHamoru cultures of mobility past and present, cultures of mobility that Perez evokes by referring to ancestral forms of Pacific Islander seafaring as well as to contemporary migratory movements. Because Perez is so invested in educating the public about the ecosocial conditions and political situation on Guåhan, his

decolonial ecopoetry continuously reaches toward larger publics and toward popular forms of environmental cultural production. Indeed, Perez himself has long been active in spoken word poetry, one of the most popular forms of political poetry today, especially among younger audiences. Just like fellow Indigenous poets Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner (Marshallese) and Aka Niviâna (Inuk), whose video for the chant-like poem "Rise: From One Island to Another" has been shared widely on social media, Perez not only reads from his collections during public performances, he also engages with readers via social media and shares videos of readings online. Apart from his printed books of poetry and these videos, he has released two CDs, one entitled *Undercurrent: An Album of Amplified Poetry* (2011, with Native Hawaiian poet Brandy Nalani McDougall), and a solo album entitled *Crosscurrent* (2017). In all these activities and projects, Perez makes his poetry accessible to audiences that his printed collections may not reach. If Perez's use of modern media aims to promote his written works and spoken words, it also tries to reach a wider audience willing to inform themselves about the social, political, cultural, and environmental justice issues his poems address. Apart from bridging generations and cultural divides, Perez's work in different media also gestures to a larger repertoire of environmental cultures of mobility.

American studies as a field has long been interested in how popular culture allows for a critical discussion of social and cultural phenomena. Similarly, ecocriticism is increasingly turning toward popular cultural forms such as genre fiction, popular music, blockbuster film, TV series, and comics to think through the multidimensional challenges that life in the Anthropocene poses and to make sense of the role cultural products consumed by wider audiences can play in addressing these challenges. As I have suggested in the introduction to *Ecopoetic Place-Making*, environmental issues and mass mobility are such challenges. At the same time, the refugee camps along the Southern border of the United States and the various U.S. travel bans of the last ten years indicate, each in different ways how immobility and processes of immobilization too are part of environmental and mobility history of the early twenty-first century, the century in which we will either manage to get the global climate crisis and the biodiversity loss it causes under control or witness collectively, albeit in starkly uneven ways, the end of the world as we know it. Whatever the world will look like in fifty years, the people living in it, like the ones today, will engage in different forms of place-making, including we must hope by producing art and literature, and just as many as today, if not more will do so while being on the move or after having migrated in one form or another. If we find it useful to think deeply about cultural representations of environmental crisis in an effort to understand the world we are currently living in, we should also consider questions of mobility and immobility and examine mobile environmental imaginaries across different media as well as the environmental cultures of im/mobility these imaginaries evoke.