“not yet / under water” – Rejecting Victimhood and Weaving Solidarity in Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner’s Eco-Poetics

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Introduction: Weaving Against Extinction Narratives[1]

“not yet / under water” (Jetñil-Kijiner, “Two Degrees” ll.111–12)

These two lines taken from Marshallese poet, performance artist and environmental activist Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner’s poem “Two Degrees” simultaneously evoke and refuse the predicted outcome of scientific projections of the effects of the anthropogenic climate crisis on the Marshall Islands. In 2014 the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) reported that by 2100, sea levels could rise up to roughly one meter, which in the case of the Marshall Islands would result in the flooding of 75% of the dry lands (Maslin 71–73). Along with other communities and nations of Oceania,[2] the Marshall Islands have been made into figureheads embodying the catastrophic extents of climate collapse (Farbotko and Lazrus; Kempf). The above-mentioned scientific estimations are, for instance, echoed in various news media such as the 16 October 2021 headline from *The Guardian*, “Rising Sea Levels Threaten Marshall Islands’ Status as a Nation” (Mcdonald). A month later, on 1 November 2021, *The Washington Post* reads “Marshall Islands Pleads with World Leaders to Stop 60,000-person Nation From Drowning” (Francis). Similarly, the *National Geographic* magazine puts forward the following article on 19 November 2018: “Rising Seas Give Island Nation a Stark Choice: Relocate or Elevate” (Letman). Crucially, words like “threat,” “plead,” “relocate” or “disappear,” reflect several problematic discourses.

Using a sensational register bordering on climate porn (Lowe quoted in Crook and Rudiak-Gould 10), a term used to convey the voyeuristic pleasure inherent to imagining Pacific Islands as already drowned, these “sea level rise narratives” (Oh 598) rob Marshall Islanders of any form of agency by ascribing to them a seemingly inevitable future as soon-to-be climate refugees, thus naturalizing the passivity of the victim position (Crook and Rudiak-Gould 10; Suzuki 69). This form of narrativization of Oceanic futures ultimately belongs to a larger body of discourse that Rebecca Oh refers to as “Pacific extinction narratives” (599), which builds on the common colonial trope of supposedly vanishing or disappearing Indigenous peoples, as well as the reputation of presumed irrelevance attributed to Pacific

Islands due to their comparatively limited geopolitical position of power (Suzuki 69). In her incisive work *Allegories of the Anthropocene*, Elizabeth DeLoughrey takes great care to establish that Indigenous island communities of Oceania threatened by sea level rise have come to represent an imagined climate crisis past that is framed as non-coeval with the rest of modernity. The submersion process itself, which Carol Farbotko titles "wishful sinking" in her eponymous article (47), is understood as a "canary in the coal mine" image and imbued with nostalgia for something that is supposedly already lost (DeLoughrey, *Allegories* 178–79). Hence, climate crisis discourse that focuses on "the innocent, nature-loving Indigenous subject" trope reflected in various media, relies heavily on discourses of salvage ethnography, a colonial movement of saving what is left of supposedly soon-to-be extinct Indigenous peoples (169–70).

Additionally, the climate violence still enacted upon the Marshall Islands is deeply entangled with nuclear violence. This is not only due to the fact that rising sea levels threaten to release the nuclear waste insufficiently trapped beneath Runit Dome located on Ānewetak Atoll (Bahng 45; Hobart 10). In fact, a similar rhetoric of inevitability has been and continues to be used to justify the nuclear bomb tests on the Marshall Islands conducted by the US (Suzuki 69). The perception of Oceania as isolated spots of land relatively empty of populations, and additionally emptied by colonial displacement, merges the "myth of isolates" – an understanding of Pacific islands as remote and enclosed spaces – with notions of *terra nullius* and corroborates the logic by which the Marshall Islands are viewed as legitimate laboratories for nuclear testing (Bahng 52; DeLoughrey, *Allegories* 170; DeLoughrey, "Myth"; Hobart 6–7; Keown, "Waves" 586). By, thus, declaring Marshallese lives and islands "ungrievable" (Butler xiv), the US deemed their victimization acceptable, haunting Marshall Islanders to this day in the form of cancer-related illness and reproductive defects (Keown, "Children" 940–41; Nixon 7). Hence, for Marshall Islanders, forms of (identity) annihilation through forced relocation or the threat of extinction are not new realities in a present of climate collapse (Crook and Rudiak-Gould 12–13).

In this article, I take up the image and poetic practice of weaving as a call to read across and between Jetñil-Kijiner's poetic works to enable an entangled reading of the nuclear and climate crises in the Marshall Islands. Her works emphasize the "weaving together [of] connections and obligations across the Pacific" (DeLoughrey, *Allegories* 193) to represent multiple forms of solidarity. In her multimedia art installation *Islands Dropped from a Basket*, presented in 2017 at the Honolulu Biennial on the island of Oʻahu, Jetñil-Kijiner focuses on the topic of a "counter-weaving of Oceanic solidarity" that can hold these nuclear histories and climate presences of the Marshall Islands and transform them (Hamilton Faris, "Ocean" 9). One of her

blog posts on her experience at a weaving workshop reflects on these transformations:

> I am reminded that our islands were literally incinerated with no other intent then [sic] to preserve *their* own survival. Because they don't want us to survive – our traditions weren't meant to survive, our bodies weren't meant to survive, our stories were/are not meant to survive. It must be easier, in their minds, if we washed away with the rising seas.
>
> And yet here we are. Weaving old and new. Creating as survival mechanism. […] In between the strands of leaves I can see a pattern for survival. A lesson in resilience. (Jetñil-Kijiner, "Weaving;" original emphasis)

Weaving together these histories and presences as well as multiple forms of solidarities, I argue, has the power to dismantle and refuse the nuclear and climate victimizing frameworks of discourse targeting Marshallese people and instead shifts the focus to survival. I do so from a position as a non-Indigenous scholar based in Germany, which implicates my positionality in many of the unequal power structures addressed here. My reading ponders the uneasy solidarities (Tuck and Yang 3) and the uncomfortable implications negotiated in selected (video) poetry by Jetñil-Kijiner.

Jetñil-Kijiner's poetry collection *Iep Jāltok* and the video poem "Rise" (2018)—the latter produced together with Inuk writer, poet and environmental activist, Aka Niviâna—focus on the unravelling of nuclear and climate victimhood discourses and the strategies of establishing transindigenous as well as archipelagic planetary relations of solidarity. These poetic works respond to the continuations of violent nuclear Pacific histories that diachronically "produce and reproduce the positions of victims and perpetrators" (Rothberg 9) in the present anthropogenic climate crisis. Since both nuclear and climate violence are characterized by a *longue durée*, it is necessary to discuss the specificities of the acts of perpetration inherent to these kinds of violences. I suggest putting Michael Rothberg's conceptualization of the implicated subject and Rob Nixon's notion of slow violence into productive conversation to investigate the victimizing structures targeting Indigenous communities of Oceania. I demonstrate that both written and video poetry negotiate the space between perpetrators and implicated subjects by weaving together the history of nuclear militarization and present-day climate threats. Thereby, the poetry discusses the violent rhetoric of victimizing discourses such as connotations of the sacrificial and the framing of the Marshall Islands as laboratory. Although strategically playing with common rhetorical tropes connected with the figure of the victim – especially through the imagery of submersion –, the poetic works reject the rhetoric of Pacific victimization and extinction and instead reclaim discursive agency through a variety of strategies, such as the

integration of Marshallese legend or evoking the gendered symbol of the child figure, while also commenting on Indigenous climate (im)mobilities. Further, Jetñil-Kijiner and Niviâna's performance of transindigenous[3] relations of solidarity contribute to a refusal of victimization by expanding Tongan scholar and philosopher Epeli Hau'ofa's theorization of Oceanic kinship and archipelagic thinking. Through evoking imageries of water and stone as well as poetic practices of weaving the performed archipelagic relationality cumulates in a consolidation of planetary relations of solidarity. Thus, the poetry, in its urgent calls for solidarities, distinctly includes implicated subjects of nuclear and climate violence against the Marshall Islands. Ultimately, Jetñil-Kijiner's weaving poetics upsets the binary of perpetrator and victim, works across multiple solidarities, and renegotiates implicatedness.

Addressing Perpetration and Implication: Between Affect and Anonymity

Media outlets and the sciences alike emphasize that Oceania produces, globally speaking, the lowest levels of greenhouse gas emissions; in numbers that means less than one percent. At the same time, Oceania is a region heavily affected by the anthropogenic climate crisis (Barnett and Campbell 10). This powerfully demonstrates that the consequences of the climate crisis are distributed unevenly across geographies while also being temporally deferred. Such processes of uneven temporal deferral have led Rob Nixon to proclaim the notion of slow violence. Invisibility, delay, and dispersion are its main criteria (2). Nixon specifies that the corresponding disasters are "anonymous and […] star nobody" (3). At first sight, the distribution of roles seems to be rather straightforward with industrialized nations as climate perpetrators and Oceanic nations and communities as climate victims. But if slow violence is anonymous and, hence, a form of structural violence, is it even possible or appropriate to use the label of "climate perpetrator"?

Rick Crownshaw emphasizes the utility of Rothberg's concept of implicatedness instead of perpetration for describing how individuals structurally participate in and benefit from the anthropogenic climate crisis (229; Rothberg 12). Rothberg defines implicated subjects as not being "direct agents of harm," although "they contribute to, inhabit, inherit, or benefit from regimes of domination" (1). Neither victim nor perpetrator, the implicated subject's entangled actions or inactions "help propagate the legacies of historical violence and prop up [present] structures of inequality" (1). To make it clearer, Rothberg tries to further differentiate the implicated subject through the notion of complicity, the most important aspect being here the diachrony of implication: "We are implicated in the past," Rothberg explains, "but

we cannot be complicit in crimes that took place before our birth" (14). Crownshaw suggests that the term "implicated subject" is useful to the field of ecocriticism because it names the *normative behaviour* inherent in *the act of the perpetration* of slow violence (Crownshaw 235, my emphasis). In other words, it names the *structural relations of perpetration*. Thinking slow violence and the implicated subject together allows to encompass the perpetration of anonymous, structural, environmental violence. Specifically, the core characteristic of belatedness of Nixon's concept echoes the necessary diachrony of implication, while the anonymity of slow violence reiterates the immanence of both victim and perpetrator positions of implicatedness. Where implication seems to sweep across many different positionalities with an, at times, equalizing force, anonymity is a shifting, almost uncanny, but certainly uncomfortable characteristic, always open to interpreting unique relations of individuals to structural relations of perpetration. Imagery and practices of poetic weaving in Jetñil-Kijiner's works, however, problematize clear-cut distinctions between these categories and qualities.

In her poetry, Jetñil-Kijiner weaves across the gaps between perpetration and implication through her use of shifting forms of poetic address while simultaneously applying an affective tone. One of the ways that such entanglements are addressed can be found in the poem "History Project," which articulates the nuclear slow violence that Marshall Islanders still have to endure. By quoting and thus identifying an individual member of the US government, such as Henry Kissinger, who reportedly said, "*90,000 people are out there. Who / gives a damn?*" (ll.15-6; original emphasis) the poem shatters anonymity and instead presents an individual complicit perpetrator. Further, this serves as reminder for the acceptability of Pacific extinction narratives amongst the US government, as it becomes clear that the victimization of the Marshall Islands is grounded in the colonial *terra nullius* doctrine: no people, no history. This violent doctrine obliterates Marshallese lives even before the impact of the bombs. At the same time, there are still other US institutions addressed in the poem, such as scientists and the military, which demonstrate implication through indifference or ignorance. First "a lab coat lost / in his clipboard" is contrasted with a boy suffering from severe symptoms of radiation exposure (Jetñil-Kijiner, "History Project" ll.23–4). The focus on work wear abstracts the scientist to a certain degree in order to highlight the anonymity so central to the implicatedness of structural violence.[4] A few lines later "american marines and nurses" (l.39) feign ignorance while they drink and play on Marshallese shores, demonstrating non-existent self-awareness for their own implicatedness in the perpetration of nuclear violence. "History Project" purposefully blurs the demarcation between perpetratorship and implicatedness and instead recenters the structural relations of perpetration. In other words, the

poem evidences that the implicatedness in these acts of nuclear perpetration is society-engulfing and exposes its structural nature while simultaneously weaving a pattern of individual perpetration into it.

The collaborative video poem "Rise", launched on the website of the environmental activist organisation 350.org, does this even more vehemently and entangles nuclear perpetration with climate perpetration and thus nuclear and climate victimization of Marshall Islanders. Although this article centres on the Marshall Islands, it is important to note that the history of (nuclear) militarization of Nunaat/Greenland by the US shows extensive parallels including seizure of lands and displacement (Hobart 6).

Jetñil-Kijiner thus approaches Niviâna:

> Sister of ice and snow, / I come to you now in grief / mourning landscapes / that are always forced to change / first through wars inflicted on us / then through nuclear waste / dumped in our waters / on our ice / and now this. / […] the colonizing monsters / that to this day devour our lives / for their pleasure. / The very same beasts / that now decide, / who should live / who should die. (03:04–03:47)

The juxtaposition of the nuclear "then" and the climate "now" poetically encloses "the colonizing monsters" and thus marks a temporal weaving of the past, present and future violences of Indigenous realities. Further, intertwining past and present acts of violence means examining diachronically continued violence and thus addresses implication. However, especially the word "monster" utilizes a sensationalist register similar to the victimizing rhetoric applied to Marshall Islanders outlined above. The contrast between "the colonizing monsters" and the pronoun "our" further establishes a binary structure between those who devour and those who are devoured. Through its affectivity (Hamilton Faris, "Sisters" 91) the lines contribute to a perpetrator/victim discourse; complicity is allocated through emotion. Anger pervading the words and facial expression of both poets continues and intensifies the affective emphasis a few lines later in the video poem (see fig. 1 in Appendix): "We have months / before you sacrifice us again / […] while you do *nothing*" (Jetñil-Kijiner and Niviâna 04:45–04:54; my emphasis). At the same time "doing nothing" contains an association of collective normative behavior, as the "you" remains, in Nixon's sense, anonymous, enfolding implicatedness as well as perpetratorship. Ultimately, this address also weaves the audience into it, triggering the discomfort of self-identifying with certain relations to implicatedness and perpetration. It is a call for the audience to name their own positionality in these structural patterns of acts of perpetration. Jetñil-Kijiner's poetry troubles the tensions that linger between the implicated subject and the perpetrator by tightly weaving both together into a relational understanding rather than demarcated boundaries.

"*for the good of mankind*" - The Sacrificial Victim

While the poems play with the binary structures of perpetrator/victim discourses and also point to the entanglements of implication and perpetration, they clearly reject any form of victimhood and its accompanying extinction rhetoric, even as some passages evoke the figure of the victim. As current public discourse shows, climate victimization means framing Oceanic nations and communities as hapless and passive in the face of environmental disaster. Jan van Dijk indicates that these associations belong to an understanding of the victim as a sacrifice that plays an important part in Western usage, harboring problematic associations.

The sacrificial connotation of victimhood opens the space for perpetrators to absolve themselves of perpetration by cloaking themselves in reasons for the greater good. In fact, the word "victim" stems from Latin *víctima*, referring to nothing less than a sacrificial animal (van Dijk 1–2). To borrow from Eve Tuck (Unangax̂) and Wayne Yang, this connotation reveals an inherent "move to innocence […] which problematically [attempts] to reconcile settler guilt and complicity, and rescue settler futurity" (3).[5] "History Project" focuses on two phrases used by US officials to erase their perpetratorship of nuclear slow violence and the ensuing victimization of Marshall Islanders. The first phrase, "it's / *for the good of mankind* / to hand over our islands" (ll.46-8; original emphasis),[6] explicitly shows that "the present worlds" of Marshall Islanders were sacrificed "for white futures" (Hobart 6). Juxtaposing "mankind" with the pronoun "our" inevitably betrays a white understanding of humanity, while the temporal association of "mankind" with future survival locks Indigenous Oceanic lives in an extinct past, naturalizing their extinction in turn. Just a few lines later, the lyrical I recounts "*God will thank you* they told us" (Jetñil-Kijiner, "History Project" ll.57; original emphasis). Keown draws attention to the ways that this line constructs nuclear colonialism in the Marshall Islands as a "divinely sanctioned process" ("War" 25), absolving the US government of any act of perpetration and thus the sacrificial framework of the two phrases looms large. This semi-religious, naturalizing absolution is granted by offering Indigenous worlds as slaughter lambs for white survival.

As Jetñil-Kijiner's poetry unravels this rhetoric of victimhood, it is also rejected. The lyrical I in "History Project" evokes notions of innocence and helplessness, initially playing into the rhetoric of victimhood in describing how the radiation hits "sleepy coconut trees" and "sagging breadfruit trees" (ll.51 and 52). Immediately, the lyrical I disengages from the role of the victim by deconstructing the sacrificial: "yea / as if God Himself / ordained / those powdered flakes / to drift / into our skin hair eyes / […] like God's just been / waiting / for my people / to vomit / all of humanity's sins / onto impeccably white

shores" (ll.58-74). Keown notes that the Christian rhetoric in these lines such as "ordained" and "sin" are reframed for anticolonial purposes ("Children" 941).[7] The "move to innocence" by the US is again exposed. Moreover, the cynical tone and the lyrical I's own point of view further voices protest against this unilateral, colonial/imperial historiography of the nuclear laboratory. The cynicism retaliates against another aspect of the sacrificial victim logic: the expectation of forgiveness on the side of the victim (van Dijk 6). Conveying anger thus refuses the supposed helplessness of the victim position here and helps to regain discursive agency. On another level, the continued endurance of the Marshall Islanders themselves disproves common rhetorical tropes of victimhood. Rebecca Oh points out that the lyrical I is "a subject of history whom history was anticipated to wipe out" (603–04; see also 608). Read across Jetñil-Kijiner's body of poetic work, which weaves a "pattern for survival," this generates a sense of hope and rejects the finality of "the belief / that tomorrow will never happen" (Jetñil-Kijiner and Niviâna 04:17–04:19), assumed and conjured for the Marshall Islands.

The poem, "Two Degrees," accentuates the "move to innocence" even more when comparing the Marshall Islands to crumbs "on a map / […] you / dust off the table, wipe / your hands clean of" (ll. 52-55). Here, however, its reference point is the climate crisis demonstrating a similar rhetoric at work. In her reflections on weaving, Jetñil-Kijiner confirms this reading when she writes: "It must be easier, in their minds, if we washed away with the rising seas" ("Weaving"). On the one hand, this again challenges readers/audiences to read climate victimization as a continuation of nuclear victimization in the case of the Marshall Islands. On the other hand, this sentence suggests a desire and even an expectation for a cover-up on the sides of perpetrators and implicated subjects. "Rise," too, addresses these disturbing aftertastes of victimization: "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" (04:45–04:54). These lines establish deep entanglements between nuclear and climate victimizations of, in this case, Indigenous communities around the globe, since the "we" here (due to their simultaneous as well as alternating voices) signifies both Jetñil-Kijiner *and* Niviâna *and* their respective communities. The verbs "watch" and "wait" in this context elicit connotations of a voyeuristic experimentation through the anticipatory qualities of these passive acts and establish unambiguous relations with the framework of the laboratory. The islands and their people are going to be sacrificed to observe and record the results of the anthropogenic climate crisis and to imagine what could become of the so-called First World (Hobart 3). Reading these lines in combination with the associations arising from the "lab coat" examining the boy's body in "History Project" frames the Marshall

Islands as "canary in the coal mine" regarding rising sea-levels and nuclear waste disposal.

Resisting Submersion, Rising from the Waters

The video poem "Rise" strongly thematizes the voyeuristic imagery of submersion, the most used image associated with the climate victimization of the Marshall Islands. At the beginning of the video poem, Jetñil-Kijiner's body is shown in gradual stages of submersion (see figs. 2-4 in Appendix). First, the audience witnesses a close-up of Jetñil-Kijiner's legs and feet at the shoreline, close to the water, but not yet touching it (00:00). Fourteen seconds later, the water reaches her calves (00:14). Two more seconds later, another close-up; this time of the artist's face. The water reaches her shoulders (00:16). The shortening temporal
distances between the images indisputably reference the speed of sea level rise that threatens Oceanic communities. Yet, while Jetñil-Kijiner repeats the same imagery and associations of vulnerability that the authors of Pacific extinction narratives employ, thus playing into a victimization, this bodily submersion is suspended through various means. Especially figure 4 (see Appendix) featuring Jetñil-Kijiner in the subversive act of "looking back" breaks with the anonymity of the victim position that is prevalent in figures 2 and 3. This image is accompanied by a line describing the Marshall Islands as "sleeping giants" (00:16), which in turn rejects the aforementioned assumptions of geopolitical irrelevance and vulnerability attributed to the Marshall Islands. In fact, as Hamilton Faris observes, the title of the poem itself becomes a sign of resistance ("Sisters" 92–93), as it forms an opposition to the act of drowning. Most importantly, however, the submersion imagery is followed by a story.

Repeating relational obligations of gift-giving in the following stanza, the Marshallese legend of the two sisters contrasts the submersion motif:

> With these shells I bring a story of long ago / two sisters frozen in time on the island of Ujae, / one magically turned into stone / the other who chose that life / to be rooted by her sister's side. / To this day, the two sisters / can be seen by the edge of the reef, / a lesson in permanence. […] We will choose stone. / We will choose to be rooted in this reef forever". (Jetñil-Kijiner and Niviâna 01:08–01:30 and 04:00–04:04)

This image is repeated in the Nunaat context with a shot of a stone statue of Sassuma Arnaa (Mother of the Sea), its base resting in the ocean (01:39; and Hobart 13). Prominent associations that arise from the stone imagery are durability and immobility. According to Jetñil-Kijiner's own comment on the accompanying blog to the video poem, the "lesson in permanence" can be translated as choosing to remain home ("Rise"). Media portrayals of climate victimization in the

Marshall Islands includes supposedly inevitable climate refugeeism. Hence, the choice to remain works against an already assumed displacement and a subsequent salvaging process. Instead, it communicates discursive agency over Marshallese futures through a strong focus on the pronoun "we" as reflected in the reference to the legend. This use of "we" sharply contrasts with the "you" in the "doing nothing" line. "Rise" rejects a future of border controls and refugee categories imagined by nation-states by weaving together imagery and text.[8] The two stone sisters as well as the statue, themselves geological mirrors to Jetñil-Kijiner's body under water, reject the mobility associated with the figure of the refugee and the helplessness at the core of the figure of the victim and thus also become an expression of Marshallese sovereignty.

Connected to the notion of permanence and immobility, the word "rooted" merits greater attention. The associated imagery of roots opens up the ground to discuss the figure of the child, a strong symbol of hope in Jetñil-Kijiner's poetry, representing the future and again rejecting extinction. Tellingly, the poem "Dear Matafele Peinam," first performed by Jetñil-Kijiner at the 2014 Opening Ceremony of the United Nations Secretary-General's Climate Summit, addresses her own daughter. Unearthing gendered power structures by contrasting anonymous men with the lyrical I's/author's daughter, the poem equates a future as a climate refugee with the extinction of Marshallese identity: "Men say that one day / that lagoon will devour you / […] They say you, your daughter / and your granddaughter, too / will wander / rootless" (ll.12-3 and 18-21). The word "rootless" contrasts sharply with the allusions to rootedness chosen by the lyrical subjects in "Rise" and here "highlights the connection between Indigenous land and identity, demonstrating that the loss of land is not simply an inconvenience but rather an uprooting of one's sense of self" (Robinson 325–26). Moreover, as if an act of deflection, the violent imagery in "Dear Matafele Peinam" depicts these "men" as benevolent philanthropists of submersion and cast the ocean into the role of perpetrator although the originators and implicated subjects of climate perpetration are located elsewhere. It is interesting to note that Jetñil-Kijiner collaborates with Inuk poet Niviâna for the video poem "Rise," seeing as Nunaat/Greenland, with its melting glaciers, presents one of the largest sources of water to the planet's oceans. This, too, could be read as a hint that the waters of Nunaat are not the real threat to the Marshall Islands.

The lines from "Dear Matefele Peinam" imagining a matrilineal genealogy of supposed victims imply that discursively feminization and victimization go hand in hand. For instance, Margaret Jolly observes that public media trying to raise awareness for the threat of sea-level rise for Oceanic communities often feature female figures in their visual outlets (176). Contrary to an assumed feminized passivity

of victimization, the poem suggests that there is agency to be found in female perspectives. Erin Suzuki comments on the legend which Jetñil-Kijiner shares during her performance of "Dear Matafele Peinam" at the Opening Ceremony of the 2014 UN Climate Conference. Jetñil-Kijiner narrates a canoe race amongst brothers that results in the youngest brother winning because he allowed his mother aboard who brought with her a sail. According to Suzuki, the legend emphasizes female Indigenous knowledges and the need to center them in a rejection of victimizing discourses (Suzuki 70). The ocean, too, in dominant Western thinking is feminized. However, it is understood as a "feminine chaos agent" (Hamilton Faris, "Ocean" 6) that, in the framework of a laboratory, needs to be kept in check. This framing is, for instance, continued in the "developmental logic of climate mitigation and adaptation policy in Oceania" (Hamilton Faris, "Ocean" 6) with regards to projects such as artificially raising the islands or building new ones (Hamilton Faris, "Sisters" 79).[9] The lyrical I in "Dear Matefele Peinam" opposes this discourse directly and instead casts the ocean into a gendered parenting role: "no greedy whale of a company sharking through political seas / […] gonna push / this mother ocean over / the edge" (ll. 30-34). The ocean is attributed with protective associations, while perpetrators are decidedly identified as "male." Thereby the narrative is reframed, securing a future for and even more so reclaiming discursive agency over the future of the child. This gesture of hope furthers the future existence of a people intended to be wiped from history while the focus on Indigenous knowledges builds a fundament for solidarity on Marshallese terms.

Forms of Transindigenous and Archipelagic Solidarities

Forming multiple solidarities is a major strategy to reject victimhood in Jetñil-Kijiner's (video) poetry. Transindigenous relations between Nunaat and the Marshall Islands are embodied in "Rise" by zooming in on images of Jetñil-Kijiner and Niviâna's clasped hands (03:29), as well as swapping lines between one another and sometimes even speaking simultaneously (e.g. 03:04 - 03:47). This visual and metaphorical weaving together of bodies and voices is further intensified by Jetñil-Kijiner and Niviâna facing each other and then synchronously gazing into the camera (03:51 and 04:08; Hamilton Faris, "Sisters" 81). Performing again a "looking back" rejects the voyeuristic gaze of the audience discussed earlier (Hamilton Faris, "Sisters" 90) and brings back the discomfort of self-identifying the audience's own implicatedness in and relations to acts of perpetration. More than that, transindigenous solidarity relations are most prevalent in the forms of address between Jetñil-Kijiner and Niviâna. Repeatedly referring to each other as "sister of ice and snow" (e.g. 00:05) and

"sister of ocean and sand" (e.g. 00:20) not only practices a vocabulary of solidarity but also places an emphasis on water.

In her article "Atomic Histories and Elemental Futures Across Indigenous Waters" (2021), Hi'ilei Julia Kawehipuaakahaopulani Hobart (Kānaka Maoli) observes the visual composition of the video poem:

> Set along the shorelines of the Marshall Islands and the stark ice sheets of Greenland, Jetñil-Kijiner and Niviâna's film trains our eyes on water as a common, elemental component of life as it shape-shifts across the globe between liquid, vapor, and solid. Nearly every shot of the six-and-a-half-minute video is saturated in grays, whites, and blues that underscore the aqueous connections between the film's two locations. (11)

Water permeates the visual cues of the video poem and weaves connections between the two places Nunaat and Marshall Islands. Jamie Hamilton Faris entitles this specific framework a hydro-ontology: an aquapelagic orientation that serves to unsettle terrestrial relationships to place ("Sisters" 79). While foregrounding Hau'ofa's well-known understanding of Oceania as "a sea of islands" ("Sea" 152; "Ocean"), this framework is simultaneously expanded in "Rise" to include, acknowledge and establish transindigenous relations beyond Oceania into the Atlantic. In the same vein, the poets pick up the theme of resilience symbolized through stone and combine it with transindigenous solidarity: "Sister of ocean and sand, / I offer you these rocks, / the foundation of my home. / […] / may the same unshakable foundation / connect us, / make us stronger" (03:28 - 03:37). Indeed, the lines could even be considered as offering yet another expansion of a purely aqueous understanding of a "sea of islands." Stone as a geological fundament of planetary scales in form of the seabed is also a connector between the islands that defies again the supposed smallness and isolation of islands (Hobart 14). The focus on stone here pushes back against "the fundamental misunderstanding of islands as being isolated rather than being interconnected by and with the ocean around them" (Bahng 52) and, thus, repels conceptualizations of sacrificial nuclear/climate laboratories.

Furthermore, Jetñil-Kijiner and Niviâna's transindigenous relations of solidarity establish a discourse "from one island to another," as the subtitle of the video poem indicates, that deconstructs the rhetoric hegemony of extinction and victimization narratives. It reveals how deeply the poets are enmeshed in Oceanic archipelagic thinking. According to Alice Te Punga Somerville (Māori), "islands are […] experienced and understood as having multiple connections to other land and liquid spaces" ("Great" 322); they are relational entities (Pugh 94). The parallels to and overlaps with Hau'ofa's understanding of an interconnected Oceania are striking, but archipelagic thinking goes further in that it lays the groundwork for a dialectic relationality between the local and the global (DeLoughrey, *Allegories* 192), and

hence makes it possible to express forms of planetary relations of solidarity. Jetñil-Kijiner and Niviâna thus purposefully position their islands not only in relation to one another but in relation to the whole world. In "Rise" planetary solidarities are prompted by inviting relations of empathy (Hamilton Faris, "Sisters" 91) in "those who watch and do nothing":

> we demand that the world see beyond / SUV's, ac's, their pre-packaged convenience / their oil-slicked dreams […]. / 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. / You think you have decades / before your homes fall beneath tides?" (Jetñil-Kijiner and Niviâna 04:09–04:42)

The pronoun "you" this time explicitly includes "the world," which addresses multiple positionalities in and relations to acts of perpetration. It indicates in an unforgiving manner that implicated subjects and perpetrators of climate violence may soon become victims themselves. As the lines reiterate a strong focus on water through an evoked future rise in sea levels, the listed cities are clearly framed as islands in the process of submersion. In other words, implicated subjects and perpetrators are enabling a self-victimizing process that further highlights the interwoven relations between the categories. These lines of poetry do not present a gentle request but a confrontational, forceful demand to engage with Indigenous knowledge and experience in solidarity.

Central to archipelagic thinking in Jetñil-Kijiner's poetry is, again, the poetic imagery of weaving and the conceptualization of the basket. In her skilful analysis of "Tell them," DeLoughrey devotes detailed attention to both and tellingly argues "the island is a world" (*Allegories* 11). "Iep Jāltok," the name of the poetry collection which Jetñil-Kijiner translates as a "basket of poetry and writing" given to the reader, is a gendered metaphor expressing relations of responsibility. At the same time as it evokes again Hau'ofa's understanding of the Oceanic, in "Tell them" weaving is steeped in associations of archipelagic solidarities, as the basket also represents the Marshall Islands themselves (DeLoughrey, "Sea" 192–93). According to Marshallese origin stories, the islands were "dropped / from a basket / carried by a giant" (Jetñil-Kijiner, "Tell Them" ll. 30-32). The lyrical I weaves a basket and fills that with handmade jewellery to offer it to her friends in America with the imperative prompt to "tell them" (e.g. l.21). Not as anger-laden as the phrase, "we demand," but similarly intense, "tell them" brings with it the obligation to engage with Indigenous perspectives on the climate crisis. As gift-giving establishes a form of kinship (DeLoughrey, "Sea" 192), the gift basket establishes the grounds for archipelagic, planetary solidarities on Indigenous terms that include implicated subjects and demands

responsibility—a responsibility also towards the nuclear past that haunts the climate present and a future survival.[10]

"Dear Matafele Peinam," too, broadens the solidarity network by engaging with archipelagic thinking, building up an archipelagic, planetary network of solidarities. The poem fundamentally distinguishes those who indulge in extinction narratives – "those / hidden behind platinum titles / who like to pretend / that we don't exist" (ll.53-56) – from reaching out to other nations continuously affected by colonial "pasts" or settler colonial nations that suffer already heavily from the climate crisis, too, such as "the Philippines" and "Pakistan, Algeria, Colombia" (ll.61-2; see also Starr 128). These place names are prefaced by the names of Oceanic islands, such as "Tuvalu" and "Kiribati" (Jetñil-Kijiner, "Dear Matefele Peinam" ll. 58-59), raising expectations of similarity between the different places. The poem plays with the problematic idea of imagining "islands in a far sea" (Hau'ofa, "Sea" 152) as isolated and unconnected. Framing places such as "Pakistan" with island names establishes a relation and negotiates an archipelagic, planetary solidarity that goes beyond Oceania and transindigenous solidarity and reveals the structures behind acts of climate perpetration. Bringing all these place names together into a relational understanding, in turn, again reframes the island as a world. The lyrical I, moreover, continues to subsume these place names under an anonymous solidarity demonstrated by an unmarked "us," which thus works against racialized frameworks of difference in the following lines:

> […] still / there are those / who see us / hands reaching out / fists raising up / banners unfurling / megaphones booming / and we are / […] the radiance of solar villages / […]/ petitions blooming from teenage fingertips / families biking, recycling, reusing, / […] and there are thousands / out on the street / marching with signs / […] and they're marching for you, baby / they're marching for us (Jetñil-Kijiner, "Dear Matefele Peinam" ll.65-87)

The evoked solidarity inescapably also includes implicated subjects to join the fight for survival, for continued existence. The poem moves from a them vs. us binary on to culminate in a collective "we are" of solidary subjects. Combining this yet again with the addressed "baby," the figure of the child, offers the ultimate rejection of passivity on the side of the supposed climate victim as well as on the side of otherwise implicated subjects "that do nothing." At the same time, this stanza returns to a juxtaposition of the pronouns "they" and "us" in its last line; a subtle move to bring back an uneasy distinction of positionalities "that neither reconciles present grievances nor forecloses future conflict" (Tuck and Yang 3) between Marshall Islanders and potential allies around the world. This added nuance in Jetñil-Kijiner's archipelagic solidarity poetics does not fully erase

power differences by weaving into it the potential for implicatedness as it puts the world in relation to the Marshall Islands.

Conclusion

In summary, Jetñil-Kijiner's (video) poetry is a basket filled with lyrical counter-weaving strategies for a rejection of climate/nuclear victimhood and a consolidation of solidarities. Bringing together different yet tightly interwoven poetic practices of discursive resistance results in a rejection of the rhetoric hegemony of Pacific extinction, a rootless nonexistence for future Marshallese generations, and instead weaves a "pattern for survival." Jetñil-Kijiner's weaving poetics renegotiate the relations between perpetration and implicatedness, nuclear and climate violence and multiple forms of solidarities and ask the reader/audience to pay attention to their own entangled and uneasy responsibilities. On the one hand, emphasizing the anonymity and voyeurism of implicated subjects and, on the other hand, identifying individual perpetrators, her practice goes beyond Rothberg's conceptualization as the poetry erases any clear dividing lines between implicatedness and perpetration. Rather, the poems enfold a sense of perpetration in the normative behavior of implicated subjects through affected poetic addresses of an anonymous "you". To the same effect, the pronoun constructs a binary relation with the speaking Indigenous subject(s). While integrating implication into slow violence opens up possibilities to be able to identify structural acts of environmental perpetration for some purposes, Jetñil-Kijiner's poetry demonstrates that the boundaries between implicated subject, perpetrator and victim are easily blurred, and the categories themselves overlap to create intricate relational patterns. This also coincides with the overarching images of water that fluidly moves between its aggregates, and, in this manner, victim/perpetrator/implicated subject are also characterized by a certain categorial mobility.

Utilizing stereotypical, binary, victimizing rhetoric strategically highlights the various working ways of how the discourse targets the lives and realities of Marshall Islanders in Jetñil-Kijiner's poetry. This is achieved by carving out the accompanying sacrificial connotations and the inherently implied "move to innocence" by colonial/imperial perpetrators as well as the "scientification" of Marshallese bodies and islands in a laboratory-like setting constructed through notions of *terra nullius* and the "myth of isolates." Yet, despite strategic applications of the victim position, the poetry examined throughout this article overarchingly rejects any form of Marshallese victimization, be it nuclear, climate and otherwise. In these instances, it upsets a clear-cut binary of perpetrator vs. victim by taking the victim out of the equation. Using the figure of her own daughter as a symbol of hope for a specifically gendered female future, Jetñil-Kijiner's poetry

centralizes forms of Indigenous knowledge production to imagine and create a future of Indigenous sovereignty especially when it comes to the meaningfulness of place-based "rootedness." Commenting in this manner on Indigenous (im)mobilities in Oceania defies victimization altogether by rising above the waters and demands agency over solutions for rising sea levels and, ultimately, the conditions of future survival on Indigenous terms.

Establishing transindigenous solidarity that reaches beyond Oceania and into the Atlantic through a vocabulary of water and stone and weaving together Indigenous bodies and voices further rejects victimization in a combined "looking back" to an anonymous implicated/perpetrating audience. Imagining archipelagic planetary solidarities that move between cultures and nations without erasing power differences, Jetñil-Kijiner's and Niviâna's discourse "from on island to another" not only presents an aquapelagic/transindigenous but also a nuanced archipelagic, planetary understanding of solidarity. The Marshall Islands are thus centered in an intricate pattern of relationalities through a framework that constitutes the world as an island and preserves the potential for implicatedness in solidarities which allows to acknowledge different positionalities. This archipelagic form of solidarity can, however, only flourish once onlookers to the "spectacle" of sea level rise in Oceania have overcome their own passivity and voyeuristic pleasure in order to step outside of anonymity and inhabit relations of responsibility.

The poem "Two Degrees" ends precisely with this reminder: "remember / that beyond the discussions / numbers / and statistics / there are faces / all the way out there / there is / a toddler / stomping squeaky / yellow light up shoes / across the edge of a reef / not yet / under water" (ll.99-112). It indicates that the anonymity at play on the side of the victim position, too, helps to facilitate voyeurism. Looking beyond numbers and faceless bodies creates an uncomfortable tension for the anonymous readership/audience ("you"). Jetñil-Kijiner's unyielding gaze in "Rise" (see fig. 4 in Appendix) as well as the imperative "remember" in "Two Degrees" demands empathy and recognition; it demands the responsibility for identifying one's own implicated/perpetrator positionalities in order to establish uneasy solidarities.

Appendix

Figure 1. Jetñil-Kijiner, Kathy and Aka Niviâna. *Rise: From One Island to Another.* 2018, 350.org/rise-from-one-island-to-another, 04:25. Accessed 19 January 2024.

Figures 2 – 4. From top left to bottom left: Jetñil-Kijiner, Kathy and Aka Niviâna. *Rise: From One Island to Another.* 2018, 350.org/rise-from-one-island-to-another, 00:00; 00:14; 00:16. Accessed 19 January 2024.

Notes

1. I would like to thank Dr. Jennifer Leetsch for asking me to join the discussion started in the panel on "Ecological Solidarities, Vulnerabilities and Resistances: Panel on Climate Vulnerability" at the 2022 GAPS conference. I deeply appreciate the collaborative work and insightful feedback. My thanks also go to my colleagues Rita Maricocchi and Alisa Preusser who have repeatedly shared their inspiring thoughts, encouragements and criticisms on smaller and larger issues discussed here.

2. A note on naming: in her article "Where Oceans Come From," Māori scholar Alice Te Punga Somerville questions and resituates the genealogy of the naming of "the Pacific" and hence the field of Pacific literary studies. Colonial in origin, the term "Pacific" has mostly been used in a binary system opposing "the Atlantic." Te Punga Somerville instead emphasizes the Indigenous-centeredness of the term "Oceania." Although first used by a French anthropologist, it may be considered thus due to the influential transnational/transcultural/transindigenous conceptualization of the term by thinkers such as Epeli Hau'ofa and Albert Wendt ("Where" 25–26). In order to emphasize this relational understanding of "the Pacific" region, I will use the word "Oceania" or "Oceanic" in this article to contrast the assumptions of smallness and isolation but will use the term "Pacific" whenever engaging with dominant "Western" epistemologies.

3. I use and understand the term transindigenous, according to Chadwick Allen, as an unhierarchical category that simultaneously does not erase different Indigenous positionalities (Allen).

4. An extensive investigation by Holly Barker and Barbara Rose Johnson of declassified US documents on the nuclear tests on the Marshall Islands corroborates the belief of many Marshall Islanders that they were deliberately exposed to fallout, so that US researchers could study the effects of radiation on human beings. Keown summarizes their main findings as follows: "The documents reveal that just six hours prior to the BRAVO test, military staff were informed that the wind was blowing in the direction of inhabited atolls but chose to detonate the bomb without evacuating the islanders […]. Further, shortly after the tests took place, under the guise of humanitarian aid, the people of Rongelap, Ailinginae and Utirik were enrolled as human subjects in Project 4.1, a US scientific study of the effects of radiation on human beings. When the Rongelap people were returned to their contaminated atoll in 1957, studies of the biological consequences of living in a radioactive environment were undertaken without the informed consent of islanders under observation" (Keown, "Waves" 592; see also Bahng 53).

5. In their much-noted article "Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor" Tuck and Yang define a "settler move to innocence" as "an attempt to deflect a settler identity, while continuing to enjoy settler privilege and occupying stolen land" (11). And further: "it erases and then conceals the erasure of Indigenous peoples within the settler colonial nation-state" (22). The "greater good" excuse gives reason to read the situation of the Marshall Islands as a concealment of erasure of Indigenous peoples by a colonial/imperial power while the legacies of nuclear "testing" still infuses large parts of their lands and waters and makes them uninhabitable (displacement). Framing these nuclear devastations as "tests" is yet another mechanism of erasure, seeing as nuclear weapons cannot be "tested" and islands are no laboratories (Hurley 6).

6. Bikini Islanders were persuaded by the US governor of the Marshall Islands to leave their homeland "for the good of mankind" and were initially told that their displacement would be temporary (Keown, "Waves" 585).

7. The relation between Christian rhetoric and atomic discourse can be expanded even further because the latter invokes "heliotropes," as DeLoughrey coined the phenomenon. In the early phase of the atomic era nuclear energy was hailed as "a new dawn, a rising sun, and the

birth of a new world" and the atomic bomb was declared "the product of a new kind of divinity" (DeLoughrey, "Heliotropes" 246).

8. According to Suliman *et al.*, the rejection of mobility in this context aligns with the opinions of many Indigenous leaders and activists in Oceania (1 and 9).

9. The amounts of sand necessary for such an undertaking inherently belongs to the sphere of, as Bahng phrases it, settler environmentalism wherein the Marshall Islands become a new "testing ground" for the climate crisis. The globally increasing demand for sand results in desperate measures. Damaged coral reefs are, for instance, pulverized to be used as a substrate (47–48). This form of violence is also addressed in "Rise": "forcing land from an ancient rising sea" (Jetñil-Kijiner and Niviâna 02:36).

10. For another discussion on gift-giving as an ethics of solidarity and reciprocity, see Trang Dang's contribution in this special issue, on "Colonial Exploitation and Indigenous Resistance in Sheila Watt-Cloutier and Cherie Dimaline."

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