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Blue Ocean Stories: Climate Colonialism and Narrative Disruption in Oceania

by

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For Agnes

Eb

Ik trek mij terug en wacht.
Dit is de tijd die niet verloren gaat:
iedere minuut zet zich in toekomst om.
Ik ben een oceaan van wachten,
waterdun omhult door 't ogenblik.
Zuigende eb van het gemoed,
dat de minuten trekt en dat de vloed
diep in zijn duisternis bereidt.

Er is geen tijd. Of is er niets dan tijd?

Ebb

I retreat and wait.
This is the time that is not lost:
every minute turns itself into future.
I am an ocean of waiting,
thin as water enclosed by the moment.
Absorbing low tide of the mind,
which ebbs the minutes and deeply
prepares the high tide in its darkness.

There is no time. Or is there nothing but time?

—M. Vasalis, *Vergezichten en gezichten*, 1954.

Abstract

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This dissertation argues that critical and creative attention to contemporary stories from Oceania opens up new ways to address the past, present and future effects of colonialism on changing oceanic environments. Colonialism is connected to climate change through issues that include rising sea levels, biodiversity loss, changing weather patterns such as floods and prolonged droughts, and ecological devastation. By examining literature, visual art and performance that go against canonical Western ways of reading the ocean, I foreground how we can unsettle climate colonialism and its effects on oceanic multispecies environments. I address how scholars of contemporary feminist materialisms and the environmental humanities can extend their study of water and the ocean to centre anticolonial perspectives via art, literature, and theory. Analysing anticolonial narrative disruption from an Oceanic perspective, this dissertation engages with work from Aboriginal, Indigenous, migrant and settler colonial scholars, writers and artists to show that the future can be oceanic and anticolonial.

The increased precarity of human-ocean relationships has been particularly visible in Oceania. Rising waters and environmental degradation do not affect all equally, nor are their causes evenly distributed. How we think about the colonial pasts of Oceania informs our imagination of oceanic futures. The effects of the mining industry, of nuclear testing, tourism, aquaculture, species extinctions, and the formation of the nation state, have had lasting consequences on oceanic spaces and how they are experienced and thought of in the present. From an anticolonial feminist materialist perspective, I aim to not only expand our ocean views but also to interrogate the perspectives that guide our gaze. I draw on research from the fields of Pacific and Ocean Studies to argue against a simplistic, oppositional and colonial relationship between human and ocean. Increasingly, but building on long legacies of oceanic thought, writers and artists from Oceania hold Western colonial discourse to account. By

communicating oceanic realities in text, visual art and performance that offer alternatives to Western ways of reading the ocean, Oceanic art and literature unsettles the colonial afterlives apparent in contemporary human-ocean environments. I listen to and analyse published and publicly performed work — short stories, poetry, visual and performance art, and memoir — that redefines how we should think about the ocean in the twenty-first century.

This dissertation comprises two contextual chapters followed by four in-depth readings of the work of several artists and writers from Oceania. The first chapter addresses recent ‘blue turns’ in environmental and feminist theories to show how the implications of colonialism have remained largely underexamined or only analysed from a Western and Northern hemispherical perspective. Blue is a colour with a distinct colonial history. It appeals to the Western colonial imaginary and drew European ships across the seas to mine blue pigment from Afghan rocks and raise indigo plantations on stolen land, with stolen labour. How has this oceanic coloniality resurfaced in climate change times? Following Sylvia Wynter, Ursula Le Guin, Donna Haraway, Deborah Bird Rose and Thom van Dooren, I articulate storytelling as a foundation method to disrupt racialised power structures in settled and colonised areas of Oceania. The work of Aboriginal, Indigenous, settler and migrant writers and authors across Oceania informs my critique of the lingering colonality of Western engagement with the seas and its associated imaginations. Mining, nuclearisation, militarisation, extinction, erasure, borders, and migration shape my discussion in four thematic chapters, which focus respectively on short stories by Gina Cole and Ellen van Neerven; poetry by Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner and Craig Santos Perez; installation and performance art by Lucienne Rickard and Mandy Quadrio; and Behrouz Boochani’s memoir *No Friend but the Mountains*. The ‘Blue Ocean Stories’ in this dissertation respond to the intersection of climate change, colonialism and the ocean, and take aim at the continued and reiterated colonality of some Western oceanic imaginaries.

Declaration of Originality

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for a degree or diploma by the University or any other institution, except by way of background information and duly acknowledged in the thesis, and to the best of my knowledge and belief no material previously published or written by another person except where due acknowledgement is made in the text of the thesis, nor does the thesis contain any material that infringes copyright.

Signed,

Susanne Maayke Agnes Ferwerda
1 February 2022

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Signed,

Susanne Maayke Agnes Ferwerda
1 February 2022

Acknowledgements

whitefellas try to acknowledge things

but they do it wrong

they say

before we begin I'd like to pay my respects

not understanding

that there isn't a time before it begins

it has all already begun

— Jazz Money, "Rinse"

This dissertation was written and researched on palawa and muwinina land. I pay my respects to their Elders, past and present, as well as those who never made it to Elder status as the result of the invasion of their worlds by mine. Any adequate acknowledgement needs to start with the understanding that this debt has never been fully acknowledged by the responsible colonial governments. What is due has not yet been paid to those who have had to suffer at the hands of the megalomaniacal tendencies of the Western world for the past four hundred years up to, and including, the present. I am grateful for the conversations I was privileged to have had with Aboriginal and Indigenous scholars, staff, and friends at the University of lutruwita/Tasmania, around nipaluna/Hobart, Australia, and Oceania. This dissertation would not have existed without the boundless scholarship and stories addressing the continuing problems of colonisation in settler nations such as Australia, where sovereignty was never ceded by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Nations, and reparations are long overdue.

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I moved to lutruwita/Tasmania for this PhD, and both the project and I inevitably changed upon arrival. The waters connected me to home but between here and there my family,

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nipaluna/Hobart, 2022

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Introduction

What we leave behind, matters to those who go before
we face the future with our backs, sailing shore to shore

for the salt in the sea, like the salt in our blood
like the dust of our bones, our return to mud

means saving the ocean, saving the bee
means London's UK seeing London's Kiribati
and sharing our thoughts over a cup of tea
— Selina Tusitala Marsh, “Unity”

When Aotearoa New Zealand poet Selina Tusitala Marsh walks on stage to perform the poem “Unity” in London’s Westminster Abbey, her words reverberate in this imperial space par excellence. She stands in front of the British Royal family, a legion of high-placed invitees as well as over a thousand school children. It is 14 March 2016, Commonwealth Day, and Marsh is this year’s Commonwealth Poet. “[I]t’s called the Va in Samoan philosophy / what you do, affects me / what we do, affects the sea” (Marsh, “Unity”, lines 11-13),¹ she says, wearing a deep oceanic blue dress (see Fig. 1) that pays homage to her Samoan-Tuvaluan-English-Scottish-French heritage but confuses some of those present. The *personal is political*, to cite a classic second-wave feminist slogan, and the blue of Marsh’s dress is interpreted by some in the audience as a political response to the royal setting and light-blue garment of Her Majesty The Queen Elizabeth II: “My dear, how politic of you to wear the royal blue”, an attendee says to Marsh afterwards. “The blue of majestic *te moana nui a kiwa*, the Pacific Ocean? Why thank you!” (Marsh, “Post-Colonial Talk Back”, italics original). Marsh’s appearance and, by extension, the Pacific Commonwealth she represents are inherently personal and political. Blue is a colour with a distinct colonial history. It has been desired by the European elite for centuries, as it came to stand in for royalty and otherworldly riches through its association with the Virgin Mary’s robes. Like the imagined treasures waiting in the minds of Europeans at the other end of the ocean, the colour blue appealed to the colonial imaginary and drew European ships across

¹ From Marsh, Selina Tusitala. “Unity”, *The Commonwealth Service: A Celebration of the Commonwealth*, 14 March 2016, 3.15 pm, Westminster Abbey, London, U.K. “Unity” also appears in Marsh’s 2017 collection *Tightrope*, with some minor differences to the performed version. Here, I cite her performance, and the text as it appeared in the Commonwealth Service booklet.

the seas to mine blue pigment from Afghan rocks and raise indigo plantations on stolen land, with stolen labour. Marsh's dress and presence, at the heart of the British empire, visualises the continued resistance against imperial power and the persistent defiance of colonisation in the Pacific region.



Fig. 1. Selina Tusitala Marsh performs “Unity” in Westminster Abbey. London, United Kingdom. 14 March 2016. Academy of New Zealand Literature/ Te Whare Mātātūhi o Aotearoa.

The poem Marsh wrote for the 2016 Commonwealth Day celebrations is titled “Unity” to follow the official theme and implore all Commonwealth nations to come together and “shar[e] our thoughts over a cup of tea” (37). These thoughts, however, subtly critique the coloniality of Commonwealth realities. The tension between the U.K., the Pacific and their relative positions within the wider Commonwealth are palpable as Marsh says: “There’s a ‘U’ and an ‘I’ in unity / costs the earth and yet its free” (Marsh, “Unity”, 23-24). Invoking her heritage and family history, she takes aim at the idea that ‘West is best’: “my ancestors were guided by sky and sea trails / and way before Columbus even hoisted his sails!” (29-30). Her words both symbolically and materially connect the Pacific region to the U.K.: “did you know there’s a London in Kiribati?” (3). Several of Kiribati’s atolls and settlements carry European names: ‘Poland’, for example, lies south of London, across the main lagoon. In her

Commonwealth poem Marsh not only talks back² to the continued colonial presence in the South Pacific, she also redefines the centre and moves her audience from London, U.K., to London, Kiribati.

Marsh's critique is visible through metaphor: "bees thrive in hives keeping their queen / unity keeps them alive, keeps them buzzing / they're key to our fruit and vege supplies / but parasitic attacks and pesticides / threaten the bee, then you and me / it's all connected—that's unity" (17-22). The instructions for writing the Commonwealth poem were to stay away from politics, but when the personal *is* political — the lived realities of Pacific life the result of centuries of colonial politics — the presence of a Pasifika woman in Westminster Abbey can only be a political statement. Her dress, her heritage and her words embody the continued resistance from the Pacific region, against the imperial coloniality that connects the ocean to the growing threat of the climate change realities shaping contemporary Pacific life.

"What we do, affects the sea" (Marsh, "Unity", 13). The water in the sea is not just water. It is more than H₂O and made up of a rich combination of materials that include salts, inorganic and organic materials, and atmospheric gases. Much of our world is covered in water and, in its many forms, it permeates our environments, our cities, our seas, our bodies. "*We are all bodies of water*" (Neimanis, *Bodies of Water* 66, italics original), Astrida Neimanis reminds us. The largest body of water on Earth, the ocean, is a clear example of the power of water to transform, stir up, drown, and submerge. Oceans, seas and bays contain almost 97% of all water on Earth. These waters sustain humans — themselves watery embodiments — and human life is connected to the seas. Water evades fixed boundaries and it is perhaps this quality that has always ignited the human imagination. The transformative and imaginative power of water has had far reaching consequences, from the Polynesian seafaring "that led to the settlement of every island in the largest ocean on the globe" (DeLoughrey, *Roots and Routes* 42) to the performance of 'climate poet' Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner who spoke the lines "we are drawing the line / here / Because baby we are going to fight / [...] we won't let you drown / you'll see" ("UN Climate Summit Poem 'Dear Matafele Peinam'") at the United Nations Climate Summit in 2014. From a Eurowestern perspective, water has inspired canonical art and literature from

² As Paloma Fresno-Calleja explains in "Talking Back, Fast, and Beyond: Selina Tusitala Marsh's Poetry and the Performance of Pasifika Identities" (2014), Marsh redefines the postcolonial notion of 'the empire writes back' — an expression from Salman Rushdie that became the title of Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin's influential book *The Empire Writes Back* (1995) — and "conceives of her poetry as a tool to 'talk back', prioritizing the performative quality of her work in line with the oral traditions that inform it and the cultural encounters and representations that originated in the colonial Pacific and which continue to determine more contemporary representations" (370).

the *Odyssey* to *The Tempest*, and, crucially to the development of the Blue Economies³ of the twenty-first century, inspired transoceanic slavery and extractive colonial and imperial economies.

This dissertation argues that critical and creative attention to contemporary ocean stories from Oceania opens up new ways to address past, present and future effects of colonialism on changing oceanic environments. Colonialism is connected to climate change and the Anthropocene (Crutzen and Stoermer, “The Anthropocene”) through issues including rising sea levels, biodiversity loss, changing weather patterns such as floods and prolonged droughts, and ecological devastation. Increasingly, writers and artists from the Pacific region are holding Western colonial discourse to account. By communicating oceanic realities in text, visual art and performance that are different than Western canonical ways of reading the ocean, they unsettle the colonial effects on ocean-human environments. Not only does a changing ocean alter shorelines and floodplains, it also magnifies the effects of colonialism to the human and nonhuman lives that are permeated by the seas. I listen to and analyse published and publicly performed work in English — short stories, poetry, fictocritical memoir, visual and performance art — that redefines how we should think about the ocean in the twenty-first century. The narratives this dissertation foregrounds, connect the Australian continent to the wider Pacific region — together called Oceania⁴ — to address the entanglement of colonialism and climate change in oceanic spaces. Like Marsh’s performance in Westminster Abbey, anticolonial oceanic climate change narratives destabilise the centrality of Western views of what we once called *El Mar del Sur* and *Mar Pacifico*:

only sea, only water, only liquid, only empty space over which people could travel in order to get to real places he [Vasco Nuñez de Balboa] imagined might be sitting at its edges. (Te Punga Somerville, “Where Oceans Come From” 25)

³ Blue economy, as defined by intergovernmental organisations and financial institutions such as the United Nations and the World Bank, refers to a range of economic sectors and related policies, such as coastal tourism, fishery, shipping, offshore mining, that regard the ocean as a resource for primarily human use.

⁴ Following the work of Epeli Hau‘ofa and Albert Wendt, the term *Oceania* spans the large insular region between Southeast Asia and the Americas, from Aotearoa New Zealand in the South to Manislan Mariânas (the Northern Mariana Islands) above the equator. It defies the colonial naming that subdivided the region in four parts: Australasia, Melanesia, Micronesia and Polynesia. The name *Oceania* connects these oceanic areas that were divided by colonial politics, racial and power relations. Wendt’s “Towards a New Oceania” (1976) and Hau‘ofa’s “Our Sea of Islands” (1994) were formative in rearticulating and reimagining the Pacific region as *Oceania*.

Never empty, and not peaceful for at least the last several hundred years, Albert Wendt and Epeli Hau'ofa's 'Oceania' redefines these waters as dynamic and Indigenous-centred, full of stories and ever-expanding depths of life.

A growing body of contemporary research, literature and art connects oceanic and coastal climate change with its colonial pasts and presents in Oceania. In this dissertation, I engage with Anglophone work from Aboriginal, Indigenous, migrant and settler colonial scholars, writers, and artists. It is important to note that as a researcher from the Netherlands, undertaking this work as a settler scholar on unceded lands in lutruwita/Tasmania, Australia, I am connected to this Country. My position as a settler colonial researcher inherently informs my practice and limitations of perspective.⁵ To avoid appropriating Aboriginal and Indigenous thought and knowledge, this dissertation is focused on expanding existing critiques of Western colonial ideologies, particularly in relation to the limitations of Western oceanic imaginations. My research is necessarily beholden to my Dutch education and upbringing. By listening to the voices and words of those that have been in Oceania for tens of thousands of years longer than I have, I aim to add to their critiques of continued colonisation of their lands, skies and seas.

I write this introduction and this dissertation close to the water. These words are written on palawa land in nipaluna/Hobart, in view of timtumili minanya/the River Derwent and the Tasman Sea, but with my feet forever planted in the North Sea off the north-western European coast. In the short story "Water Country", Bundjalung and Kullilli journalist Daniel Browning explains his relationship to his 'Water Country', "a sand peninsula on the far north coast of New South Wales. A place called Fingal" (7):

Country is a place. It's also a state of mind.

For me at this very moment, it's intangible – a beautiful memory.

⁵ Even though I am Dutch, and lutruwita/Tasmania is my home only temporarily, living and working in Australia positions me as a settler colonial inhabitant of land that was stolen from Aboriginal nations. I am therefore a citizen and part of a historically and presently colonial empire, as well as a settler coloniser of lutruwita/Tasmania. The Dutch Republic (1581-1795) and the Kingdom of the Netherlands (1815 to present) has held many overseas colonies, including former colonies in Ghana, South Africa, Indonesia, Western Australia, Iran, Suriname, Guyana, and Tobago, as well as current overseas territories in the Caribbean Netherlands: the overseas countries and territories in the Netherlands Antilles (Aruba, Curaçao and Sint Maarten), and the three 'special municipalities' of the Kingdom of the Netherlands: Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba.

I live so far from my country I can only perceive it in my mind. I can't hear the Pacific Ocean rushing the coastline. I can't hear the wind in the casuarina, that beautiful song.

When I go home the greatest sense I have is of the sound cushioning me. I know I'm at home when I hear that particular timbre of the ocean buffeting the shore.

A long, thunderous echoey drone – sometimes, a low, barely audible whisper.
[...]

Country is embodied, it's lived. Country describes a relationship as much as a place. (Browning 7)

The Water or Sea Country that in Aboriginal thought such as Browning's is described in reciprocal and multispecies terms, has in the history of my culture been interpreted as a one-directional relationship of extraction. I am reminded of the common Dutch expression 'het water zit ons in het bloed', or 'water is in our blood'. Water is part of the Netherlands as it relates to specific geographical features such as marshes and wetlands, with a significant portion of the land 'reclaimed' from the sea. Water is, moreover, part and parcel of the Netherlands as a global colonial extractive economy. The Dutch East India Company (VOC) and its history of transoceanic bloodshed extended all the way to what we once called 'Nieuw Holland' and 'Nieuw Zeeland' and are now known as Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand. When we say that water is in our blood, this specifically refers to our sea-faring extractivism: the people and goods stolen by the VOC in the seventeenth and eighteenth century, the so-called Dutch 'Golden Age', and the global trade that funded the rise of the Dutch empire. To address the lasting legacies of European empires' colonial profiteering, this dissertation follows Sylvia Wynter's advice to move outside of the "limits of the monocultural field of the West" (Wynter in Wynter and Scott 2006). She urges us to learn from other cultures and their ideas, but apply them to our own conceptions and preconceived notions of what it means to be human in a time of increased climate instability:

if you move outside these limits, look at other cultures and their other conceptions, then look back at the West, at yourself, from a trans-genre-of-the-human perspective, something hits you. (206)

What hits me most in these encounters, is how contemporary engagement with the ocean and climate change discourses are indebted to the longer histories and stories of colonial power imbalances. The legacy of extractive capitalism can be seen in the unequal distribution of climate change effects and environmental devastation. Rising waters and barren lands do not affect all equally, nor are their causes evenly distributed. These ‘colonial afterlives’ (Hartman), and what Christina Sharpe calls the ‘wake’ of slavery, lie at the heart of Western oceanic exploitation. They have also surfaced in the scholarship that responds to the intersection of climate change, colonialism and the ocean, and that takes aim at the continued and reiterated coloniality of some Western oceanic imaginaries.

From Fields to Seas

In feminist new materialisms and the environmental humanities, the fields in which this dissertation is located, the ocean is inspiring new imaginaries and alternative ways to think about water. Environmental humanities research has long been mostly land-focused, but via works such as Philip Steinberg’s *The Social Construction of the Ocean* (2001), Horden and Purcell’s “New Thalassology” (2006) and Elizabeth DeLoughrey’s *Routes and Roots* (2007), the blue humanities have emerged as a critical area of scholarship to reinterpret the expansive nature of environmental thought in relation to the waters of the world. A term attributed to Early-Modern English literature scholar Steve Mentz, the blue humanities have become defined as an alternative perspective to the green ecologies and environmentalist theories of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century. The rise of Anthropocene discourse and its initial terrestrial focus added to the importance of extending ideas and imaginaries from green fields, mountains and plains to weather, rivers, oceans and seas. Taking the notion of the Anthropocene ‘out to sea’ (Alaimo, “The Anthropocene at Sea” 2017), Stacy Alaimo’s *Exposed: Environmental Politics and Pleasures in Posthuman Times* (2016) and Astrida Neimanis’ *Bodies of Water: Posthuman Feminist Phenomenology* (2017), engage a distinctly feminist new materialist perspective in relation to water, embodiment, Anthropocene seas and wet materiality.

Concurrently, in the field of Pacific and Ocean Studies, anticolonial critiques of some of these new turns to the sea have called attention to the long history of oceanic scholarship from Black Atlantic, Caribbean and Pacific Oceanic perspectives, such as Alice Te Punga Somerville’s 2017 paper “Where Ocean Come From”, in which she explains how in the study

of oceans the Pacific has long remained unacknowledged. She cites Banaban scholar and poet Teresia Teaiwa, who pointedly writes:

somewhere along the way, the dialogue between studies of the Pacific and studies of humanity have broken down, so that those of us in Pacific studies who want to have dialogues across geo-cultural regions are faced with such an enormous level of ignorance that we are sometimes forced to draw analogies and make comparisons that we think will help attract critical attention to the Pacific. (“On Analogies” 73, as cited in Te Punga Somerville 27)

Building on research from thinkers who we might call ‘blue humanities scholars avant la lettre’ such as Paul Gilroy, Édouard Glissant, Kamau Brathwaite, Jamaica Kincaid, Epeli Hau‘ofa, Albert Wendt, Teresia Teaiwa and the long presence of people, communities and nations living in Oceania in close proximity to and with the ocean, Te Punga Somerville rightfully asserts that a turn to the ocean is not ‘new’: “*We have already been here: writing about the ocean, producing work one might call Ocean Studies*” (29, italics original).

In this dissertation, I take an interdisciplinary approach, acknowledging and integrating these concerns coming from Pacific and Ocean Studies to show how the ocean has become a site of interest in the environmental humanities. Alongside these discourses and fields, the long history of anticolonial, Black, Indigenous, queer, and feminist theory informs my argument that when we think about the ocean in relation to climate change realities, what happened in the past exists in the present and vice versa. How we think about the colonial pasts of Oceania informs our imagination of an oceanic future. The effects of the mining industry, of nuclear testing, tourism, aquaculture, species extinctions, and the formation of the nation state, have had lasting consequences on oceanic spaces and how they are experienced and thought with in the present. Taking an anticolonial feminist materialist perspective, I want not only to expand our ocean views but also to interrogate the perspectives that guide our gaze. I move from fields to seas so that harmful, stereotypical and colonial perspectives of the Pacific — that peaceful ocean that deserves to be peaceful once more — can be addressed in our, by which I mean Western, theorisations of the waters that entangle human and nonhuman life in Oceania.

Imagining the future happens in the stories we tell. My practice of reading and attending to textual and visual art is informed by Sylvia Wynter, who argues that *homo narrans*, the human as a storytelling species, can bring us to undo the conceptual confines of Western mankind. The artists, authors, and thinkers whose work is foregrounded in this project question

ideas of Western supremacy and anthropocentric views of nature and culture. In the following chapters, I incorporate the theoretical frameworks discussed above to learn from stories published and presented across Oceania that respond to the entanglements that are shaping new oceanic worlds and upturning the problems of the past. These stories appear in different forms and come from different traditions and perspectives. The two theoretical and four thematic chapters in this dissertation are shaped by reading, watching, and listening to these stories and the knowledges they offer to the world. Inspired by what Deleuze and Guattari call ‘minor-literatures’, the genres and modes of writing and creating that are foregrounded in this project unsettle the dominant social order, shift the language we can use to write against the grain and continue centuries of oceanic resistance.

I diverge from majoritarian readings of so-called ‘climate fiction’, or Cli-Fi (Goodbody and Johns-Putra 2019) that have tended to focus on novels of British and settler North American and Australian origins. Some scholarly attention has gone to the work of Waanyi author Alexis Wright, in particular to her novel *The Swan Book* (2013) that describes environmental and social injustice in a future Australia, from the perspective of Oblivia, a young Aboriginal girl. However, most scholarship concerned with climate fiction has foregrounded the study of the Anglo-American or British novel, with particular interest in the late twentieth and twenty-first century novels of Barbara Kingsolver, Margaret Atwood, Jeanette Winterson, Nathaniel Rich, Cormac McCarthy, Kim Stanley Robinson and Paolo Bacigalupi, and writing from the 1960s to 1980s by J.G. Ballard, Ursula Le Guin and George Turner.⁶ These texts offer important insights into the growing public and literary concern for global warming and climate change affected futures, and highlight “climate change and the political, social, psychological and ethical issues associated with it” (Johns-Putra and Goodbody 2).

For my analysis of the intersection of colonialism and climate change in Oceania, however, work of particular relevance tends to be created outside mainstream publishing, available in smaller galleries and conceived of via noncanonical creative practices. This disruption to the institutionalisation of literary and creative practice is reflected in the places and stories that are reimagining or ‘unworlding’ dominant Western imaginaries in relation to the ocean. These stories from the seas incorporate a diversity of forms and perspectives that do

⁶ See the introduction to *Cli-Fi: A Companion* (2019), edited by Axel Goodbody and Adeline Johns-Putra, and Adam Trexler’s *Anthropocene Fictions* (2015), for a detailed analysis of the emergence of the genres and styles represented under the umbrella terms of climate or Anthropocene fiction.

not always adhere to movements of capital that dictate the global artistic and literary market. Short fiction, poetry, installation and performance art, and memoirs of resistance are not created to ‘sell’ in the same way as novels or paintings often are. The art and literature that is foregrounded in this dissertation goes against the financial and cultural ethics of the global capitalist market. Working with both visual and textual narratives, narrative disruption materialises via both form and content. My call to tell better stories for future earthly and oceanic survival is supported by the idea that all narratives are material. They shape our responses and responsibilities toward one another in/of the world: an ethics that “is not about right response to a radically exterior/ized other, but about responsibility and accountability for the lively relationalities of becoming of which we are a part” (Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway* 393). We are all already connected to the coloniality of the ocean and its reiterations via the changing climates of the twentieth and twenty-first century. Arguing against these colonial reverberations, this dissertation aims to reinforce the anticolonial material approaches that were also already present in these blue ocean stories.

Donna Haraway’s 1988 essay “Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective” is foundational to my understanding of knowing and being in the world. Knowledge has never been a disembodied phenomenon that can be tapped into. When I write, I *do theory* as a situated and vibrant practice of ‘thinking-with’ that produces worlds as much as it is affected by them. Against “the wandering eye” (586) of the West, Haraway’s question “With whose blood were my eyes crafted?” (585) informs the paths I take in this project. I aim to hold the views of others to account, as I interrogate my own partial perspective. As Adrienne Rich reminds us: “[b]egin with the material” (Rich, “Politics of Location” 213).

A Brief Chapter Overview

The first two chapters, “Blue Ocean Theories” and “Storytelling as Anticolonial Method”, form the theoretical and methodological framework of this dissertation. In the four thematic chapters that follow, “Mining Ocean Islands”, “A Pacific Anthropocene Poetics”, “Kelp Encounters” and “The Waves, the Ocean”, I analyse and interpret the textual and visual work of prominent and emerging artists and writers from Oceania to unsettle the coloniality of climate change realities.

In “Blue Ocean Theories: Colonialism and Oceans in the Environmental and Blue Humanities”, I examine the study of the Anthropocene and the ‘blue’ interventions into

environmental research, to show how the implications of colonialism have remained largely underexamined or analysed from a singularly Western and Northern hemispherical perspective. Drawing on recent scholarship addressing this problem, I consider it imperative to acknowledge the colonial legacies of human-ocean entanglements. Even the colour blue itself has a long colonial history and many colonial afterlives, from navy blue to ultramarine and indigo. I analyse three recent shifts and blue approaches: the blue humanities, blue Anthropocenes, and blue feminist materialisms. By untangling the stereotypical Western oceanic imagination and the ways in which the study of the ocean has emerged in contemporary environmental scholarship, I address the primacy of coloniality in blue environmental debates.

Chapter two, “Storytelling as Anticolonial Method: Unworlding the Human”, introduces storytelling as a foundational method to disrupt the racialised power structures in settled and colonised areas across Oceania. I build on Sylvia Wynter’s critique of the “Human as noun” in favour of “being human as praxis” (“Human Being as Noun?” 7): the human as a storytelling species, or, what she calls *homo narrans*. How does contemporary use of storytelling renew attention to the entanglement of climate change and colonialism, via a critique of who is included in the category of human, and who is not? And what are the ethics and responsibilities involved for working with storytelling to address the problems with continued Western dominance? The work of Sylvia Wynter, Ursula Le Guin, Donna Haraway, Thom van Dooren, and Deborah Bird Rose shows that telling a different story is imperative to envisioning an alternative, anticolonial future.

Mining, nuclearisation, militarisation, extinction, erasure, borders and migration, shape my discussion and close analysis of the work of Gina Cole, Ellen van Neerven, Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner, Craig Santos Perez, Lucienne Rickard, Mandy Quadrio and Behrouz Boochani in four thematic chapters. These Aboriginal, Indigenous, settler and migrant writers and authors from across Oceania work in a range of different genres, forms and media. This dissertation uses the notion of stories flexibly, attending to storytelling in both written and visual formats. The stories I analyse inform my critique of the lingering coloniality of the ocean and its associated imaginations. In chapter three, “Mining Ocean Islands: Shadow Places and Queer Black Futurism in the Short Fiction of Ellen van Neerven and Gina Cole”, I examine histories of sand and phosphate mining in relation to the short fiction of Mununjali Yugambeh author Ellen van Neerven and Aotearoa New Zealand author Gina Cole. The short stories “Water” and “Melt” underscore how the politics of belonging and the notion of home intersect with colonial imperial mining practices in the Quandamooka/Moreton Bay region of eastern Australia and on Banaba, an island in the Pacific Ocean. With Val Plumwood, I ask how these ‘shadow places’

— “the places that take our pollution and dangerous waste, exhaust their fertility or destroy their indigenous or nonhuman populations in producing our food, for example” (“Shadow Places” 147) — and the stories van Neerven and Cole tell, use the consequences of mining islands and coastlines by colonial states to shift discussions of belonging and displacement in climate change times.

In chapter four, “A Pacific Anthropocene Poetics: Writing the Tide Against Militarisation in the Poetry of Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner and Craig Santos Perez”, I discuss written and spoken word poetry by Marshallese poet Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner and Chamoru poet Craig Santos Perez in relation to the militarisation of the Pacific Ocean. My analysis focuses on a close reading of their texts and their performance in front of both live and virtual audiences. Both poets use conventions of slam poetry and digital visual media to spread awareness of what the militarisation and nuclearisation does to Pacific islands and the lives they sustain. The work of Jetñil-Kijiner draws on connections between the ocean and the maternal, while Perez approaches the connection between human life and the oceans through the idea of ‘water is life’. Both use these figurations to criticise continued colonial and imperial presence in the region.

Chapter five, “Kelp Encounters: Extinction and Resurgence in the Art of Lucienne Rickard and Mandy Quadrio”, extends the importance of ‘water is life’ to connect above- and under-water spaces. In the visual and performance art of settler-Australian artist Lucienne Rickard and palawa Tasmanian Aboriginal artist Mandy Quadrio,⁷ kelp bridges ocean and shore. Their work emphasises the multispecies relationships at the heart of kelp encounters. The global effects of climate change and increased loss of nonhuman marine life in lutruwita/Tasmania is connected to the enduring legacy of the Tasmanian Aboriginal extinction myth. In the waters of south-eastern Australia, the disappearance of kelp forests negatively affects human and nonhuman life that depends on kelp encounters. The genocidal history and proliferation of extinction myths in lutruwita/Tasmania complicates the notion of mass or species extinction. Mandy Quadrio’s work reasserts the survival and resurgence of Tasmanian Aboriginal communities to pose the question: what is at stake in lutruwita/Tasmanian kelp encounters? The stories these artists tell upend common narratives of extinction and disappearance in oceanic spaces. This chapter looks at Rickard’s and Quadrio’s visual art and performance work to question how concepts such as ‘erasure’, ‘extinction’ and ‘resurgence’

⁷ *palawa* is the *palawa kani* (the constructed Tasmanian Aboriginal language) word used to refer to today’s Tasmanian Aboriginal community. For a more detailed explanation of *palawa kani*, see footnote nr. 47 in chapter five, “Kelp Encounters”.

unfold the connection between contemporary representation of species extinction and the many lives that encounter kelp.

The sixth and last chapter, “The Waves, The Ocean: Boats, Borders and Refugee Bodies in Behrouz Boochani’s *No Friend but the Mountains*”, draws on Gloria Anzaldúa’s concept of borderlands to investigate the implications of both visible and invisible oceanic borders on the lives and movement of refugees. In Kurdish-Iranian author, activist and journalist Behrouz Boochani’s fictocritical memoir *No Friend but the Mountains* (2018), the consequences of Australian oceanic border politics are seen through the eyes of a refugee who experiences the colonial ocean firsthand. Via the figure of the boat, a migratory vessel that is central to the colonial project, to sea-faring Oceanic cultures as well as to transoceanic migration in the twentieth and twenty-first century, I close this dissertation and address the boundaries that are drawn across the waves. How do ideas of stable and solid borders reinforce Western oceanic imaginaries? Boochani’s *No Friend but the Mountains* shows that the ocean was never empty. The offshore detainment of refugees who move across Australian waters is the result of a long history of Western exceptionalism and racial vilification.

“Blue Ocean Stories: Climate Colonialism and Narrative Disruption in Oceania” shows that the coloniality of the ocean matters to the climate change realities felt throughout Oceania. Rising sea levels, increased extreme weather, warming waters and other effects of global warming continue to displace oceanic people and the many other species that rely on ocean environments. Mining, nuclear testing, militarisation, species extinction and erasure of Aboriginal and Indigenous sovereignty continues to harm the lives entangled in and with the ocean. Attending to the stories and art from Oceania shows that while the ocean has colonial pasts and presents, we can think about its future otherwise. Taking into account what oceanic people, animals, plants and the water itself have to say, perspectives shift from endless limits to boundless opportunities.

The Politics of Naming

The process of naming has been used in invasive and colonial ways. In lutruwita/Tasmania, this is present in urban infrastructure, as well as written in the lands and seas. Streets are named after colonisers, settlements after British towns, and the hills and marshes that were once abundant in native flora, carry the scars of colonisation as ancient forests are burnt and cleared, and eucalypt hills make way for pastures and suburbs. To remain attentive to the colonisation

that happens via the words we use, names and terms must be used with respect to how the communities they describe, use them.

Dual naming is an increasingly common practice in Australia. Aboriginal and dual names are written into policy across more and more regions, including lutruwita/Tasmania that observes the *palawa kani* Tasmanian Aboriginal name 'lutruwita' and the preferred lower-case, as well as the common settler colonial name 'Tasmania', to describe the island region. Where dual names are used, they are referred to as such throughout this dissertation. The term 'Aboriginal' is used and capitalised to refer to the nations, clans, cultural and language groups of the first people of the continent and surrounding islands that by the current settler-government are understood as Australia. When referring to specific groups, the name of the nation, island or community is preferred over other more general descriptors. This includes the preferences of Torres Strait Islander peoples and islands, who are not equated with Aboriginal people, and are referred to as 'Torres Strait Islander peoples' or with reference to their more specific nation, island or community name. Some languages, such as *palawa kani*, italicise language names and use only lower-case, which is observed accordingly.

In reference to peoples and nations in the island regions of Oceania, names with which people describe themselves are respected. These include 'Chamoru', 'Māori', 'Pasifika', 'Pacific Islander' and 'Islander', which are capitalised accordingly. When referring to specific nations, cultural or language groups, the names with which people identify themselves are used. The term 'Indigenous' appears in reference to First Nations peoples in settler colonial settings around the world.

Colonial names and groups are described by the name of the nation or ethnicity they belong to. Descriptions such as 'Dutch', 'British', or 'European' are capitalised to adhere to the custom to capitalise ethnic and (trans)national identities. The term 'Western' is capitalised only to distinguish from 'western' as used to refer to a geographical or climate orientation.

Describing Black or Indigenous theory, these words are capitalised, whereas other theoretical areas such as queer or feminist theory are not. In lowercase, 'black', does not refer to people, only to the pigment that carries this name. I write the word 'white' in lower case, irrespective of what or who it refers to. 'We', 'us', and 'our' only refers to groups of people, communities or nations that I personally belong to, this being Dutch, Western, white and European. No possessives are used to describe people or communities other than my own.

These decisions are more than questions of style. The politics of naming is harnessed to communicate respect and support the ongoing fight for sovereignty of Indigenous nations and communities across the world.

1. Blue Ocean Theories: Colonialism and Oceans in the Environmental and Blue Humanities

Eventually man, too, found his way back to the sea. Standing on its shores, he must have looked out upon it with wonder and curiosity, compounded with an unconscious recognition of his lineage. He could not physically re-enter the ocean as the seals and whales had done. But over the centuries, with all the skill and ingenuity and reasoning powers of his mind, he has sought to explore and investigate even its most remote parts, so that he might re-enter it mentally and imaginatively.

— Rachel Carson, *The Sea Around Us*

Seen from space, the earth is called the Blue Planet. Blue is a living metaphor for life, and marine life was long imagined to constitute the largest biomass on Earth.

— Serpil Oppermann, “Stories Seas and Living Metaphors in the Blue Humanities”

More than a decade before *Silent Spring* (1962) would change agricultural policies and pesticide use in the United States, Rachel Carson wrote a trilogy on the history of water, the oceans, and the origins of the earth. Carson was a marine biologist who throughout her career published extensively about oceanic life. In *The Sea Around Us* (1951), the second book in the trilogy, feelings of wonder and curiosity for Earth’s natural riches reign.⁸ In part one, “Mother Sea”, she tells the story of the evolution of Earth: how from a planet made of gases that cooled down and liquified, life began in newly-formed “warm, dimly-lit waters” (12). As ‘mother sea’ wore away at the solidifying rocks of the planet, the seas slowly receded and made way for the first plant and animal life to move to shore. While some mammals such as seals, sea elephants and whales eventually returned to their watery beginnings, in Carson’s vision man is standing on the shore, overlooking the seas and contemplating how he can return and use them:

He built boats to venture out on its surface. Later he found ways to descend to the shallow parts of its floor [...] he found ways to probe its depths, he let down

⁸ The trilogy consists of: *Under the Sea Wind* (1941), *The Sea Around Us* (1951), and *The Edge of the Sea* (1955).

nets to capture its life, he invented mechanical eyes and ears that could re-create for his senses a world long lost, but a world that, in the deepest part of his subconscious mind, he had never wholly forgotten. (19-20)

The idea that ‘Man’ should use the ocean to entertain his mind and imagination with “mechanical eyes and ears” reflects the period in which Carson published this second volume in her sea trilogy. The 1950s saw a newfound popular interest in uncharted oceanic spaces and exploration of the deep sea. As Amanda Hagood explains, when *The Sea Around Us* was published in the summer of 1951, the American reader was in the thralls of the deep ocean: “in 1950, *National Geographic* had featured undersea photographs—some of the first of their kind—taken by the immensely daring and talented Frenchmen Jacques-Yves Cousteau and Frederic Dumas [...] Cousteau captured, perhaps more than any other figure of this time, the libratory spirit of marine explorations” (63). The deep seas became visible to a Western audience for the first time in modern history. Cousteau, who had been in the French navy during the Second World War, brought the viewer closer to life underwater in a way that Carson verbalised in her written work. At the same time, both worked against the “background of the United States’ growing geopolitical expansion into world oceans—and with it, the assumption that the sea was a virtually unlimited resource, as well as a readily available dumping ground, for the growth of American industries” (Hagood 60). Beyond the newfound wonders of underwater oceanic life, the mid-twentieth century was marked by increased attention to the depths of oceanic resources. Ignited by the Second World War, the world’s oceans were militarised and used as space to test nuclear weapons. As capitalism and globalisation expanded in size and influence, oceans offered their riches in a way that is reminiscent of earlier imperial impulses. The explorative nature of Cousteau’s deep-sea photography and Carson’s narration of the watery beginnings of life represent an ‘oceanic turn’ underway at the time. But alongside the love and admiration of oceanic environments and species that was found anew, imperial traditions and dreams of mastery prevailed.

Rachel Carson’s work changed mid-twentieth century popular science writing toward environmentalism and a newfound appreciation of ‘nature’. Her work on pesticides and world oceans promotes the idea that humanity is part of the natural environment and that we should take better care of it. Carson’s work inspired a sense of care for environments that had come under threat of what we now call ‘climate change’ and sparked public debates around conservation and care for the environment that reverberate today. But in her efforts to teach her readers a sense of wonder for the ocean and the world, imploring people to treat it with care

and urgency, she reproduced a sense of control and the promise for ‘Man’ to rediscover “a world long lost, but a world that, in the deepest part of his subconscious mind, he had never wholly forgotten” (20). The idea of the ocean as a ‘lost world’ that can be found reiterates a sense of discovery, mastery and control that is part and parcel of the colonial Anglo-European imaginary of territorial expansion.

In 1945, four years after the publication of the first volume in Carson’s sea trilogy, the ‘United States Presidential Proclamation No. 2667’, colloquially known as the ‘Truman Proclamation’, remapped the world oceans. It set in motion a change of the ‘law of the sea’. Until then, most nations considered territorial waters to be up to 3 nautical miles from the shore. The Truman Proclamation extended U.S. territory out to 200 nautical miles, from that point in time known as the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). This started a race to claim oceanic space, as more and more coastal nations tried to secure territorial waters of their own, to use for their abundance of mineral resources and the rights to fish. In 1958, the UN *Convention of the Law of the Sea* (UNCLOS) further reinforced the reterritorialisation of the world oceans.⁹ These mid-twentieth century developments ignited an oceanic turn and sea-scramble that has since become a topic of interest in contemporary environmental humanities research.

Environmental humanities scholarship has since the turn of the twenty-first century become decidedly ‘bluer’. As oceanography, geophysics, and marine biology drew attention to the physical properties of the deep seas, global attention shifted to one of the most visible signs of climate change: global sea-level rise. In response to this ‘oceanic turn’, research in the humanities and social sciences began to question humanity’s entanglement with the seas as part of a wider ‘material turn’. If the oceans are changing and humans have caused it, who are these humans and what constitutes human-ocean relationality? This chapter, figuratively speaking, dives into the conceptualisation of the ocean in the environmental humanities, ecocriticism and feminist materialisms, which has culminated in several interconnected oceanic environmental research areas, such as the ‘blue humanities’ (Mentz, Alaimo), ‘hydrofeminism’ (Neimanis), ‘critical ocean studies’ and ‘transoceanic imaginaries’ (DeLoughrey). In response to the notion of the ‘Anthropocene’ and the idea of humanity’s lasting influence on the geological state of the planet, the oceanic environmental humanities have offered active analysis of human-oceanic entanglements. This chapter emphasises an anticolonial and feminist materialist approach to new oceanic theories. How has the oceanic turn presented itself within

⁹ For a more detailed postcolonial and critical geographical analysis of UNCLOS see DeLoughrey’s *Routes and Roots* (2007) and Steinberg’s “The Maritime Mystique” (1999).

environmental humanities research and related feminist posthumanisms? Analysing recent anticolonial, decolonial and Indigenous feminist theoretical interventions into environmental humanities scholarship, this chapter shows that leaving soil behind for water does not necessarily generate a blank oceanic slate for material interpretations. Imperial and colonial legacies seep into how we think about the ocean.

In this chapter I argue against a human/nature, human/sea divide, following a growing body of scholarship that positions “the sea as a material actant in a posthumanist world” (Winkiel 1). I orient this chapter toward the coloniality of both past and present ocean imaginaries, toward what we might call ‘wet colonialisms’. What happens to the colonial histories and presents of seas and oceans when these waters are declared material actors? What does it mean to argue that seas and oceans act and are embodied? Oceans are neither innocent, nor to blame for their current state of upheaval. They are not good, not bad, right, wrong, inherently safe or dangerous to human life. Following Astrida Neimanis, I want to emphasise that “[c]urrents of water are also currents of toxicity, queerness, coloniality, sexual difference, global capitalism, imagination, desire, and multispecies community” (*Bodies of Water* 15). How do contemporary and dominant environmental, anticolonial and feminist theories of the ocean account for these currents and for the colonial legacies of both the waters of the world and the theories written about them?

Against Rachel Carson’s assertion that “[t]he sea has always challenged the minds and imagination of men and even today it remains the last great frontier of Earth” (*The Sea Around Us* vii), this chapter addresses the coloniality of ‘Man’ and his oceanic ‘frontiers’. As scholars bring the ocean into contact with environmental research their colonial and imperial tendencies have resurfaced. In both the study of the Anthropocene and ‘blue’ interventions into environmental research the implications of colonialism have remained largely underexamined — or, rather, analysed only from a singularly Western and often Northern hemispherical perspective. Drawing on recent scholarship addressing these issues, this chapter shows that it is imperative to acknowledge the colonial legacies of human-ocean interactions. In this chapter, I emphasise a critique of the colonial blind spots of environmental humanities research and remaining tendencies to reiterate humanistic ideologies. By untangling a universalised Western imperial oceanic consciousness, I hope to direct the environmental humanities toward better future representations of the ocean in blue theories.

Blue Theories and Colonial Entanglements

In the introduction to *Prismatic Ecology: Ecotheory beyond Green* (2017), Jeffrey Jerome Cohen writes that “green dominates our thinking about ecology like no other, as if the color were the only organic hue, a blazon for nature itself” (xix). The colour green has become a synonym for nature and ecology and a preferred descriptor for sustainability. ‘Going green’ or ‘living green’ stands for adopting a zero-waste and sustainable lifestyle, connecting colour to aesthetics and, more often than not, to a more digestible type of capitalist consumerism. Cohen argues, “such a colorful ascription begs the question of exactly what mode of being we are attempting to sustain, and at what environmental cost” (xx). He refers to recent critiques of green consumerism but additionally to the binary separation between nature and culture that a ‘green reading’ tends to reproduce. Within the cultural study of oceans there has been an increased prismatic shift toward the colour blue, often articulated as an explicit move away from the largely terrestrial focus of green ecologies and green environmentalism, toward blue aquatic enquiries. But what happens when green becomes blue? Does expanding the colour scheme of environmental theories change its connotations? When we twist a hypothetical kaleidoscope of environments and green makes way for blue, the underlying colonial patterns tend to remain intact. After explaining how the colour blue has long been the imperial colour of choice, I analyse three recent shifts and blue approaches, the blue humanities, blue Anthropocenes and blue feminist materialisms, to show that blue is no more innocent a colour than green.

Blue Colonialisms

The blue of seamen’s uniforms, so ubiquitous now as to be taken for granted, is not due to the corollary with the color and that of the sky and sea.

— Geczy et al., “Sailor Style”

In the second half of the eighteenth century, officers of the British Royal Navy began wearing dark blue uniforms. Up to that point naval officers had worn their own clothing. But in order to rebrand the Royal Navy, secure a lasting image of authority and differentiate between ranks, from 1748 onward ‘navy blue’ uniforms became standard issue. The British naval uniforms would soon inspire the global naval dress. A deep blue was chosen, not to signify sky or sea, but for a reason “far more logistical, relating back to the British colonization of India and the

expansion of the East India Trading Company” (Geczy et al. 145). Colonialism had found its way into the visual representation of the British naval powers.

At the time, one of the commodities the British exported from India was the plant *Indigofera tinctoria*, the main ingredient of the vivid blue indigo dye. Indigo had been used sparingly in Europe throughout history. The ancient Greeks named it the ‘Indian substance’ (Ἰνδικόν φάρμακον), which via Latin (*indicum/indico*) and Portuguese became ‘indigo’ across several seventeenth century European languages. In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, India had been the “world’s earliest major center for indigo growing and processing [...] the most important variety of indigo in early trading systems, *Indigofera tinctoria*, was domesticated here” (Kriger 120, italics original). Because the indigo plant is native to tropical zones in South Asia, the Americas and Africa, indigo dye had been expensive and rare in Europe until the growth of the British empire on the Indian subcontinent in the seventeenth century and the colonisation of the Americas in the eighteenth century. The British choice to dye their naval uniforms indigo was motivated in part by their access to it, but also because it is a very colour-fast dye: “outclassing other colors in withstanding extensive exposure to sun and salt water” (Geczy et al. 145). The deep blue indigo colour that we now know as ‘navy blue’ thus has a distinct colonial and military history. Its proliferation is connected to the rise of the British empire.

This section looks at several blue colonialisms, to better understand the implications of recent shifts toward blue approaches in the environmental humanities. If we are indeed in a ‘blue turn’, what is the historical and conceptual baggage that the colour blue carries? How do these theories colour their past and present watery submersions? Following the material dimensions and socio-historical aspects of several blues, this section shows that its colonial connotations should not be ignored.

Navy blue is not the only shade of blue with an unmistakable oceanic colonial origin story. The histories of several blues can be traced back to early capitalist trade and colonial expansions across the seas. For a long time, the most beautiful blue in the world was widely considered to be ultramarine, also named ‘true blue’, or, according to the fourteenth century Italian painter Cennino Cennini, “the most perfect of all colours” (Cennini 36). The ultramarine pigment is mainly composed of the blue mineral lazurite, which is the main component of the *lapis lazuli* stone (Latin for ‘blue stone’), that owes its deep blue shade to a mixture of minerals: lazurite, silicates and iron pyrite. This means that natural ultramarine is not an entirely uniform shade of blue. The lapis lazuli stone covers a wide range of shades: “from a deep, almost violet blue,

through the royal blue of the gem quality to light blue, a turquoise and finally fewer pieces of brilliant green” (Hermann 24). The finest quality of lapis lazuli was described as “a pure royal blue without blemish” (24) that could be turned into a deep and irresistible blue pigment.

It is incredibly labour intensive to extract natural ultramarine from ground lapis lazuli. The process involves grinding stones to a fine powder and mixing it with wax, resin and linseed oil:

This mass, usually wrapped in a cloth, was left to sit for several weeks, after which it was kneaded in rain water [sic] or a diluted solution of lye. The blue particles dispersed into the liquid, while the impurities remained in the mass. This process was usually repeated several times, with each successive extraction generating a lower quality pigment. The final extraction—consisting largely of colourless material, and a few small blue particles—was known as ultramarine ash. (van Loon et al.)

The high cost of the imported raw material, combined with the laborious process to produce high quality pigment, meant that for a long time ultramarine was at least as expensive as gold. The deep blue of ultramarine has therefore long been a symbol of extravagance and luxury. The trade of lapis lazuli dates to at least the Mesopotamian Late Ubaid period, circa 3500 BCE, “probably the first moment that man had sufficient wealth and leisure to begin the quest for luxuries” (Hermann 21). Our current knowledge of the history of ultramarine dates begins with the fifth-century murals in Nisa (Turkmenistan) and extends to the twenty-first century. In March 2001, the sixth century Bamiyan Buddha statues were declared false idols by the Taliban government in Afghanistan and blown up with dynamite. Once upon a time, the two Buddhas had been covered in precious stones and ultramarine and carmine robes. In his travel report, *xī you jì* (“The Journey to the West”), Chinese monk Xuanzang describes his visit to Bamiyan circa 629-645, as he makes a detour on his way to India to see the giant sculptures:

To the north-east of the royal city there is a mountain, on the declivity of which is placed a stone figure of Buddha, erect, in height 140 or 150 feet. Its golden hues sparkle on every side, and its precious ornaments dazzle the eyes by their brightness. To the east of this spot there is a standing figure of Sākya Buddha, made of metallic stone (teou-shih) in height 100 feet. It has been cast in different

parts and joined together, and thus placed in a complete form as it stands.
(Xuanzang in Beal 50)

The ultramarine pigment that was used for the robes of the smaller Buddha statue likely came from the nearby mines in the Blue Mountain (Koh-e-Laguard). The mines in the Sar-e-Sang valley (the ‘Place of the Stone’) in the Badakhshan mountains in north-east Afghanistan were the main supply for European and Persian ultramarine up until 1830.¹⁰ Afghan ultramarine was most extensively desired in Europe in the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries, when it was transported from East to West along the famous Silk Route from Afghanistan to Syria and across the Mediterranean Sea into Europe. This journey remains imbedded in its name. Ultramarine, in Latin, means ‘beyond the sea’. It refers to the voyage beyond the Mediterranean Sea that European traders had to take to obtain the pigment, but also signifies its superlative blueness — the most blue, more blue than the sea — so blue that every artist in the fourteenth, fifteenth and sixteenth century aspired to use it.

In *Bluets* (2009), her autobiographical prose-poetic ode to the colour blue, Maggie Nelson writes that ultramarine “had to be *made* holy, by the wicked logic that renders the expensive sacred” (59, italics original). In the Middle Ages, Afghan lapis lazuli was so expensive that painters could only use it sparingly, dependent on the wealth of their patrons. To not waste its extravagance on unworthy subjects, only the most highly regarded, most holy subjects in Western Christian art were afforded the deep blue pigment. Ultramarine’s otherworldly cost and provenance could only be justified by restricting its use to honour the otherworldly divinity of the Virgin Mary. The blue robes that Mary wears in Giotto’s *Lamentation* (1306), for instance, are painted in ultramarine blue, a tradition that would continue for centuries and would solidify the narrative connection between blue and otherworldly riches. The ultramarine blue of Giotto’s work and in particular his depiction of the life of Christ and Mary in the Scrovegni Chapel in Padua, Italy, has challenged theorists. What effect does the perceived extravagance of the colour blue have on its signification and identification?

In “Giotto’s Joy” (1980), French feminist philosopher Julia Kristeva writes that the overwhelming colours used in Giotto’s fresco’s, and in particular the overwhelming blues,

¹⁰ Lapis lazuli has been found and mined across the world, including in Canada, Italy, Pakistan, Myanmar, Siberia, Chile, California and Colorado. The Afghan mines are the oldest source of ultramarine, and the place where the highest quality lapis lazuli was found. They supplied the Ancient Egyptians, Romans, Greeks and Mesopotamians.

translate “instinctual drives into colored surface” (207). Kristeva’s feminist psychoanalytical analysis draws on colour perception theory and infant vision development to argue that blue has a quality ‘beyond identity’: “the perception of blue entails not identifying the object; that blue is, precisely, on this side of or beyond the object’s fixed form; that it is the zone where phenomenal identity vanishes” (208). On the basis of André Broca’s paradox that ‘to see a blue light, you must not look directly at it’, Kristeva argues that blue always escapes identification. Feminist visual art theorist Barbara Bolt explains Kristeva’s experience of seeing Giotto’s blue as the “experience of the (Lacanian) Real erupting into and disrupting signification [...] colour is destabilizing” (62). Kristeva writes:

[A]ll colors, but blue in particular, would have a noncentered or decentering effect, lessening both object identification and phenomenal fixation. They thereby return the subject to the archaic moment of its dialectic, that is, before the fixed, specular “I”, but while in the process of becoming this “I” by breaking away from instinctual, biological (and also maternal) dependence. (Kristeva 208)

If, following Bolt and Kristeva, the colour blue indeed decentres and destabilises — allowing for a noncentred becoming — what does this mean for following colonial blues in the environmental humanities? How do the colonial histories and connotations of ‘Giotto’s blue’, and many other prominent global blues, respond to the non-fixed, noncentred, I that is in the process of becoming that Kristeva invokes in “Giotto’s Joy”? In other words, who is Kristeva’s ‘I’ that sees Giotto’s blue, the person she describes as the “visitor as he enters into the semidarkness of the Arena Chapel [...] struck by the light that is generated, catching the eye because of the colour blue” (207)?

Narrating the colonial histories of ‘Giotto’s blue’ and ultramarine shows that its destabilising factors have worked differently in different places and for different people. When ultramarine and indigo meet, they destabilise the idea that expansive wealth and obtaining new minerals and materials across the seas is a universal sign of linear progress. Kristeva’s viewer walks into the Scrovegni Chapel as a Western subject, a Humanist I, overwhelmed with his vision of control over the natural wealth of the world. He loses himself just by looking at the colour on the walls. The very presence of Giotto’s brilliant blues reinforces the West’s economic and political force but simultaneously exposes its limits.

Ultramarine blue is first and foremost an expression of wealth and power, whereas indigo became seen as a ‘lesser blue’ in comparison. The European preference for ultramarine

went beyond Medieval and Early-Modern spirituality. The indigo-ultramarine hierarchy was established to protect the economic stability of European ‘woad’, *Isatis tinctoria*, an indigo blue that is native to Europe. Indian grown indigo, *Indigofera tinctoria*, the plant later used to dye British naval uniforms, was a more versatile dye than European woad. Once the Portuguese sailed around the African continent in the fifteenth century and established a sea trade route between Asia and Europe, indigo became one of the most valued commodities imported across the seas. Throughout the medieval period, European monarchies attempted to block the trade of indigo in order to protect the economic stability of the local woad production. Indigo became colloquially known as the ‘Devil’s Dye’, in opposition to the godly ultramarine. But once the Portuguese, the Dutch and then the British established maritime connections between Europe and Asia, indigo was imported in such vast quantities that woad prices dropped. In the seventeenth century, indigo emerged as the dominant blue of the modern world (Sandberg 24-43). By the eighteenth century, indigo production had become inextricably entwined with the transatlantic slave trade.

Motivated by the widening market for indigo, the British invested in the creation of large-scale plantations in the ‘New World’ in order to expand indigo production and increase their own wealth. The extensive use of slave labour on large plantations on occupied lands in for instance Jamaica and South Carolina meant that even with the added cost of transporting indigo back to Europe, British merchants could keep the price of indigo so low that woad could no longer compete. Indigo became the blue that would make the British empire wealthier than it had ever been. This came at the cost of many African people’s lives, whose bodies were used to grow indigo and many of whom died when they were forced to cross the Atlantic Ocean. After the American Revolution, the British lost access to cheap American indigo and moved their production to India, expanding their empire eastwards by colonising Bengal and erecting indigo plantations on the lands of local farmers. In 1917, Mahātmā Gandhi would lead the first Satyagraha movement in Bihar.¹¹ This movement staged a protest against British colonial rulers who forced north-Indian farmers to grow indigo on their lands. The indigo plant became a symbol of oppression during the struggle for Indian independence from British colonial rule.

The interlocking oceanic colonial histories and timeless popularity of ultramarine and indigo should not be ignored by the ‘blue turn’ in the humanities and environmental theories. When engaging in blue analysis, and thereby inevitably invoking the memorable hues of the

¹¹ Satyagraha, a compound of the Sanskrit *sandagraha*, meaning “*sada*: good; *agrade*: adherence” (Majmudar 138) was the name that symbolised Ghandi’s “philosophy [...] the power of truth based on nonviolent courage and self-suffering” (138).

famous blue pigments of Western history, it is important to remember that the colour blue has built empires, taken lives and altered environments. The materiality of indigo and ultramarine is drenched in the legacies of maritime colonial expansion and the growth of Western wealth, to the detriment of the regions and people it used to obtain these sought-after colours. In “Deep Blue Geomeditations: Following Lapis Lazuli in Three Ecological Assemblages” (2018), Patricia Pisters describes the work of Dutch artist Pieter Paul Pothoven, who travelled to the Sar-e-Sang lapis lazuli mines in Afghanistan in 2009, intrigued by the rich history of the stone. The photographs he took make up a series called *In Absentia* (2010); they “show a dark rocky void that are ‘the negative of the blue stone,’ indicator of its absence in the Blue Mountain, and its dispersed presence over the world in artifacts and at works [*sic*]” (Pisters 41).



Fig. 2. *In Absentia*, entrance to Sar-e-Sang. Pothoven, Pieter Paul. *In Absentia*, Main Mine, Adit #4, 2010-2015, C-print 60.5 x 92 cm, Dürst Britt and Mayhew, Den Haag, the Netherlands.

Pothoven photographed the entrance to the main mine. The resulting three images (see Fig. 2 for one of these three) are almost entirely black and grey with some flecks of light that look like reflections of the gold-coloured iron pyrite. Its dark and hollow appearance, Pisters notes, is “a reminder of the condition of the mine workers, who risk their lives in their daily journey up the mountain to go into the belly of the mountain to blast, drill or cut out its blue matter with

very simple tools and in unsafe conditions” (41). The empty mine is representative of the dark history and idolisation of the colour blue. It is a reminder that the colour blue is not merely an evocative metaphor. Its material history shows that veneration incited ongoing consequences. In recent ‘blue turns’ and theoretical shifts that recentre the colour blue, these consequences and their causes live on. Diving deeper into the rationale behind the recent theorisation of the ‘blue humanities’, the following sections connect the material-histories of blue with the study of the ocean, water and the seas in three blue approaches: the blue humanities, blue Anthropocenes and blue feminist materialisms.

Blue Humanities

The new millennium is bringing humanities scholarship back to the sea.

— Steve Mentz, “Toward a Blue Cultural Studies”

I attempt to sketch the ocean—and Ocean Studies—from the perspective of those who have not needed a ‘turn to the sea’ because we were already there.

— Alice Te Punga Somerville, “Where Oceans Come From”

In the second edition of *A Dictionary of Critical Theory* (2018), edited by cultural theorist and Deleuzian Ian Buchanan, an entry on the “Blue humanities” was added. Steve Mentz is the only blue humanities scholar mentioned in the short descriptor and his work is proposed as “foundational [...] in the field” (“Blue humanities”). Buchanan defines the blue humanities as a movement that “seeks to give emphasis to an aspect of the text that is usually overlooked but can nonetheless be demonstrated to be crucial” (“Blue humanities”). This refers to “the presence of the ocean in cultural texts”, but unlike the work of other (unnamed) blue humanities scholars, “[f]or Mentz [...] it goes beyond that: it is also about re-establishing a kind of poetics of the ocean, thus re-establishing a humanistic connection with it” (“Blue humanities”). In this section, I draw broader genealogies for the blue humanities beyond a single ‘origin story’ that starts with the work of Early Modern English literature scholar Steve Mentz. While Mentz’s work has been influential for the burgeoning field of blue environmental humanities and cultural studies, inspiring others, myself included, to dive deeper into articulating human-ocean relationality in twenty-first century environmental literature, Mentz’s blue theories have inherent limitations that are common in Western theorisations of the ocean. I analyse the study of the ‘blue’ in the humanities from a material-historic and anticolonial perspective to move

beyond the centrality of Anglo-Western literature and thought. The ‘blue’ in the humanities has been part of a much longer discussion of water, seas and oceans in diverse discourses, long before Mentz reframed these ideas via the colour we generally associate with the aquatic.

The blue humanities has over the past decade asserted itself as an emerging field under the umbrella of the environmental humanities as a challenge to ‘green’ perspectives. Yet, since this reappraisal of the study of oceans and water within Western theoretical discourses, several issues have arisen that connect the cultural study of world waters with the histories of blue materiality. When Mentz writes about the importance of the ocean to “our culture” (*At the Bottom* 99), a distinct vantage point emerges: a Western and Anglophone perspective that foregrounds a watery view while standing on the shores of empire. In *At the Bottom of Shakespeare’s Ocean* (2009), Mentz writes that a blue cultural studies should “retell the old stories differently” (99). He characterises the blue turn in humanities scholarship as “a way of looking at the terrestrial literary culture from an offshore perspective” (99). But whose shores do we see? And who is doing the seeing? By separating shore and sea, Mentz’s articulation of the blue humanities reinforces an idea of distance, rather than continuity, between water and land.

The potential of the blue humanities to foreground changing human-ocean relationships in the twenty-first century via the material-metaphor of the ‘blue’ can only begin to be understood in relation to those who have long studied the importance of the oceanic, well before the elemental became a primary concern for environmental studies and ecocriticism. The ‘blue thread’ I tease out in this section, entangles the genealogy of the blue humanities with those of its most prominent precursors from Black Atlantic, Caribbean, and Pacific oceanic thought. The recent recentering of the colour blue and its connections to environmental humanities scholarship moreover continues work from several discourses that have gathered themselves in recent years under umbrella terms such as island studies and ocean studies with scholarship that runs across disciplinary boundaries and gathers ideas from a wide range of humanities and social science disciplines. Moving outward from Pacific thought to the multioceanic genealogies of the blue humanities, we can then think of blue scholarship via its homonymic “roots and routes” (DeLoughrey, *Roots and Routes* xi).

In “Where Oceans Come From” (2017), Alice Te Punga Somerville addresses the omission of the Pacific in contemporary ocean studies. “To write about the Pacific”, she explains, “is to constantly feel unacknowledged” (27). The “familiar genealogy” (27) that describes recent ‘turns to the sea’, tends to originate ocean studies in the Atlantic Ocean. Te Punga Somerville

summarises this common view as: “Ocean Studies began in the Atlantic and now casts its eye around marginal oceans to gain a broader view” (28). Moving from the Atlantic outwards reiterates the marginalisation of ‘other’ oceans, such as the Pacific and the Indian Ocean, and reinstates the Atlantic as the centre of oceanic theory. This reproduces a linear genealogy that Te Punga Somerville asks her reader to relinquish: “I want to ask whether Ocean Studies might be better understood as if it were itself an ocean: without a singular starting point or origin; endlessly circulating” (28). Asking for scholarship to relinquish the centrality of the Atlantic, Te Punga Somerville does not propose to move the centre to the Pacific instead. Understanding ocean studies as ‘endlessly circulating’ means undoing the binary of here/there. This asks the Western or settler academic to no longer consider the Indian Ocean or the Pacific as an ‘other’ ocean.¹² The connectivity of oceans renders oppositional thought mute. Te Punga Somerville ultimately proposes an ocean studies that accounts for its wide genealogies: “I attempt to sketch the ocean—and Ocean Studies—from the perspective of those who have not needed a ‘turn to the sea’ because we were already there” (28). Ocean studies, like the blue humanities, did not start in the twenty-first century: “*We have already been here: writing about the ocean, producing work one might call Ocean Studies*” (29, italics original). Te Punga Somerville builds a genealogy for Ocean studies informed, for instance, by the work of Samoan writer and thinker Albert Wendt and Tongan writer and philosopher Epeli Hau‘ofa, whose naming of ‘Oceania’ drew from Caribbean archipelagic thought from for instance Saint Lucian poet Derek Walcott’s “The Sea is History” (1969) and the influences of Caribbean and Black Atlantic philosophy and poetry. When we sketch the blue humanities like Te Punga Somerville does with ocean studies, as if it were itself ‘blue’, and draw together the material and historical connections to water and coloniality, the genealogies that ground its fluid origins become apparent.

In the influential essay “Our Sea of Islands” (1993), Hau‘ofa argues that pervasive colonial interpretations of islands and oceanic spaces have long rendered the Pacific region as “islands in a far sea” (152). He argues that because these are not small, isolated, insignificant or marginal places, the name ‘Oceania’ better reflects this “sea of islands” (32). Oceania was ever only seen as small, “as a condition of the colonial confinement that lasted less than a century in a history of millennia” (35). He notes that borders and boundaries have “been defined

¹² Indian Ocean blue humanities scholarship includes the work of Isabel Hofmeyr, such as her “Literary Ecologies of the Indian Ocean” (2019) which includes discussion of a wide range of Mauritian and South African oceanic literary texts that have “prompted a set of new immersive methods that seek to go below the waterline” (1).

only recently, crisscrossing an ocean that had been boundless for ages” (30) and that a narrow perspective of the region has threatened to replace the “cosmologies of the peoples of Oceania” who “did not conceive of their world in such microscopic proportions [...] Their world was anything but tiny. They thought big and recounted their deeds in epic proportions” (31). Transpacific seafaring and kin connections “forged centuries before Europeans entered the Pacific, in the days when boundaries were not imaginary lines in the ocean but points of entry that were constantly negotiated and even contested” (33-34), undermine the idea of the Pacific as a collection of small islands in a large global world. Hau‘ofa’s anticolonial ‘sea of islands’ acknowledges the centuries of human and nonhuman connections that did not stop at the beach but boundlessly continued across the seas, through it, over it and under it.

Hau‘ofa’s work redefines the colonial in Oceania and turns blue ocean studies into an ocean of islands. His work has been influential not only to Ocean studies and the blue humanities but also to island studies. As he notes in “Our Sea of Islands”, islands have been undervalued, stereotyped as ‘small’ and therefore insignificant, which Hau‘ofa contests and counters with his formulation of ‘Oceania’ as a “sea of islands” (32). Island studies is a discourse involved in the transdisciplinary study of the ecologies, histories, cultures, materialities of islands, archipelagos and the waters that bind them. Inspired by Black Atlantic and Caribbean thought from thinkers that include Paul Gilroy, Édouard Glissant, Kamau Brathwaite, and Jamaica Kincaid. Island studies has come to inform contemporary engagement with the boundaries between land and water that is crucial to the blue humanities. In honour of the launch of *Island Studies Journal* in 2006, and calling forth research by thinkers such as James Clifford, Margaret Jolly, Patrick Kirch, and Françoise Péron, Godfrey Baldacchino writes: “An island can be both paradise and prison, both heaven and hell. Any island, any islander, is a contradiction between ‘here’ and ‘there’, gripped by negotiating the anxious balance between roots and routes; like the body, both sustained and yet threatened by incursion” (5). Aiming to study islands “on their own terms” (Baldacchino 7), island studies, like ocean studies and now the blue humanities, has been informed by thought from a wide range of geographical locations and genealogies of thought.

The blue humanities borrow from island studies an interest in the encounter between land, water, and the life that navigates these borders. The blue humanities are, moreover, inspired by thought that was always already a critique of the colonisation of island and ocean spaces and cultures. However, homogenising colonial histories across oceans erases their specific historical and contemporary realities, particularly in relation to diasporic histories, creolization and continued Indigenous cultural and political presence. As Elizabeth

DeLoughrey points out in her influential study of postcolonial Caribbean and Pacific literatures, *Root and Routes: Navigating Caribbean and Pacific Island Literatures* (2007), “[t]he Caribbean and Pacific Islands do not fit neatly into a postcolonial paradigm because they do not share simultaneous colonial histories even though they have been (and still are) occupied at different points by Christian, Spanish, French, British, and American capitalist empires” (5-6). Like island and ocean studies, the blue humanities needs to take the complex regional histories and presents into account when articulating its engagement with the aquatic from a post- or anticolonial humanities perspective.

In their expansion of the terrestrial environmental humanities, scholars of the blue humanities such as Stacy Alaimo do not only appreciate the diversity and wideness of world waters but also its depths. In Western theorisations, large bodies of water have long been defined as alien (Helmreich, *Alien Ocean* 2007), unimaginably vast, and large flat surfaces for sailors to traverse or the swimmer to drift across. In Steve Mentz’s *Ocean* (2020), part of the Bloomsbury *Object Lessons* series of short texts “about the hidden lives of ordinary things” (“Object Lessons”), the idea that the ocean is inherently alien is a central tenet: “[t]he great waters open up a dynamic environment, fluid, saline, moving, and moved. Our bodies and imaginations register the shift from a familiar *terra* to alien *oceanus*” (Mentz, *Ocean*, “Deterritorializing Preface”, italics original). Stacy Alaimo looks at the deep sea in her recent blue humanities research in order to extend knowledge of the oceans vertically. In “The Anthropocene at Sea” takes aim at the idea of an ‘alien ocean’: “when scientific and popular rhetorics cast distant depths and abyssal creatures as ‘alien’, they imaginatively remove them from the planet, from the terrain of human concern, and even from reality [...] it may [...] spark the detached awe of the spectator and deflect responsibility, as what is alien dwells beyond the domain of earthly concern” (Alaimo, “The Anthropocene at Sea” 154). A deeply speciesist and colonial imagination runs through the idea that the ocean is and always has been unknowable. Engaging with the ocean from a more-than-human and anticolonial perspective casts doubt on the humanist currents running through the ‘alien ocean’. Removing the ocean from human concern, reiterates a binary divide between human and nature with dangerous consequences. It obscures human responsibility for the current state of the oceans, and when human-ocean interdependence is removed the wet, ‘alien ocean’ space runs the risk of again being co-opted for the benefit of imperial and capitalist expansionist rhetoric. If no one knows the ocean, does that mean its capital and resources are up for grabs? It is imperative to call attention to the fact that while, in the words of Elizabeth DeLoughrey and Tatiana Flores, “[t]he ocean is often represented as a nonhuman, nonhabitable place”, it is “domesticated, militarized,

touristed, exoticized, and rendered anthropomorphic” (133). The idea of an ‘alien ocean’, particularly articulated from a Western theoretical point of view, neglects to account for all the ways in which ‘othering’ the ocean has been used as an excuse to exploit it.

If the environmental humanities are primarily a call to better understand and respond to environmental challenges, what does it mean to take them out to sea? What happens when the existing terrestrial bias of environmentalism, in Stacy Alaimo’s terms, “becomes submerged” (“Unmoor” 407)? Alaimo connects the depiction of the ocean as alien to the Anthropocene, a concept used to describe the scale of human impact on the earth’s geological state. The discourse on the Anthropocene has in itself seen a significant shift in focus toward the oceanic. The following section looks at the origins of the Anthropocene and its current oceanic inflections. Analysing criticisms of the notion of the Anthropocene and its wet coloniality by Kathryn Yusoff, Heather Davis, Zoe Todd, Christina Sharpe and Elizabeth DeLoughrey, I question the centrality of the figure of the ‘human’, or *anthropos*, to make way for what Sharpe refers to as the ‘atemporal disaster’ of Black death.

Blue Anthropocenes

[W]hat would it mean to take the Anthropocene out to sea? What problematics, what figurations, what epistemologies would that generate?

— Stacy Alaimo, “The Anthropocene at Sea”

The Anthropocene is a twenty-first century term that has become the dominant descriptor to refer to the current geological age of Earth. It collates several global crises, including increased extreme weather events such as floods, droughts, fires and hurricanes, oceanic acidification and sea-level rise, species extinction and rising global temperatures. The Anthropocene symbolises the irreversible impact of human life and the planetary scale of ‘the human’, which as the central figure *anthropos* has become a geological force in itself. The concept took shape in the geophysical and atmospheric sciences, following Paul Crutzen and Eugene Stoermer’s popularisation in 2000 with a short article called “The ‘Anthropocene’” in the newsletter for the International Geosphere-Biosphere Programme (IGBP) and a paper by Crutzen in *Nature* in 2002. Jan Zalasiewicz et al. describe the Anthropocene as a “time interval marked by rapid but profound and far-reaching change to the Earth’s geology, currently driven by various forms of human impact” (Zalasiewicz et al. “The Working Group on the Anthropocene” 56).

Beyond the natural sciences, the Anthropocene has increasingly dominated conversations in the social sciences, humanities and arts, particularly in relation to the “temporal and spatial reach of the human” (Alaimo, “The Anthropocene at Sea” 153). Historian Dipesh Chakrabarty warns of the limits of totalising humanity in relation to contemporary crises:

[A] crisis that concerns humanity as a whole cannot ever be adequately addressed if the issues of justice, power, and inequality that divide and fragment the same humanity are overlooked in the narratives we tell ourselves.
(“Foreword” xv)

The dominance of ‘the human’ in Anthropocene discourse has been received with suspicion among humanities and social science scholars, making way for a range of approaches to shift the conversation from ‘human impact’ to situated interpretations that address the influence of power and difference. Scientific bodies in geology and stratigraphy, such as the Anthropocene Working Group (AWG) of the International Union of Geological Sciences (IUGS), decided in May 2019 to adopt the Anthropocene as a “formal chrono-stratigraphic unit”, and asserted that its beginnings are “optimally placed in the mid-20th century, coinciding with the array of geological proxy signals preserved within recently accumulated strata and resulting from the ‘Great Acceleration’ of population growth, industrialization and globalization” (“Working Group on the ‘Anthropocene’”). They propose a more precise potential Anthropocene starting point at 5:29 am on 16 July 1945, the date and time of the detonation of the first nuclear bomb called the *Trinity*, in Alamogordo, New Mexico, in the United States. The AWG identified several changes to “the Earth System that characterize the geological Anthropocene” (Zalasiewicz et al. “The Working Group on the Anthropocene” 56):

These include: marked acceleration of rates of erosion and sedimentation; large-scale chemical perturbations to the cycles of carbon, nitrogen, phosphorus and other elements; the inception of significant change in global climate and sea level; and biotic changes including unprecedented levels of species invasions across the Earth. (56)

The AWG concluded its assessment of the distinct change in planetary geological processes that the Anthropocene represents with a warning. While the future of the Anthropocene is in

no way clear-cut and “will depend on future changes [...] it seems likely that, as humans continue to operate collectively as a major geological agent [...] human impacts will become increasingly significant” (59). It is this supposed ‘collectivity’, and, by extension, the flattening of responsibility for the Anthropocene and its future changes, that has incited critique from a range of scholars. Scholars across the humanities, social sciences and the arts have extended the questions of *if* and *when* the Anthropocene came to exist, to focus on *how* the story of the Anthropocene is told, narrated and visualised. How does the centrality of the human figure obscure the specificities that indicate *which* humans are responsible for the current articulation of lasting planetary change? Moreover, what is the significance of nonhuman agency and the entangled and embodied relationships of humanity with the more-than-human, with land and the seas?

The Anthropocene as a concept benefits from critical analysis that questions its homogenising principles. Scholars such as Zoe Todd, Heather Davis, Kathryn Yusoff and Elizabeth DeLoughrey emphasise the colonialism of the Anthropocene and its connections to the waters of the world. I agree with DeLoughrey’s assertion that “[i]n reading the human in the science of the planet, most geologists have tended to favor narrow histories of the global north that are not engaged with human complexity” (*Allegories* 22) and critique the universalisation of the human as a category with a linear and progressive history, imagined as separate from his environments. How does the Anthropocene reiterate the anthropocentrism of the nature/culture divide, and what does the idea of humanity as a Westernised totality mean when engaging with oceanic environments? To expand a narrow reading of the Anthropocene, I draw attention to the blue material-histories that permeate its conceptualisation. Human-ocean relationships have made a tremendous impact on the current geological state of the planet, yet, in a largely land-based and global north-oriented discourse on the Anthropocene, remain underexamined.

The rise of the Anthropocene saw the resurrection of the figure of *anthropos* and a reiteration of humanist, anthropocentric and Eurocentric epistemologies and ontologies. Many recent critiques of the Anthropocene revisit late-twentieth century feminist, queer and posthumanist discussions concerning the problems with the nature/culture divide. Science and technology philosopher Bruno Latour remarks that “there are a lot of ways of re-naturalizing the Anthropocene” (Latour and Davis 49). The Anthropocene is an attractive concept to reinstate a primary divide between human and nature and reinscribes the idea of human domination over nature in geological strata. Returning to his longstanding criticism that Modernity arises as the

divide between the natural world and social world is reinstated (*We Have Never Been Modern* 13), Latour troubles the idea “that the human is already unified under the sign the Anthropocene” (49). He points out that “[o]f course, politically that’s absurd. There is no human able to play the role of the *anthropos*” (49, italics original). The critique of the abstract ideal of Man in the Anthropocene is, in part, a return to twentieth century debates against speciesist and gendered readings of the human as ‘outside nature’.¹³ Problematizing anthropocentrism, and nature and culture as a dual system, has been central to feminist theory, as well as Black and Indigenous theories that critique the ‘Man of Nature’ for his racism and sexism. The Anthropocene reignites these debates by asking, if the Anthropocene is supposed to refer to the ‘Age of the Human’, who is this human, and which events have set this new epoch in motion?

In “The Promises of Monsters” (1992), U.S. feminist theorist Donna Haraway writes that “[w]e must find another relationship to nature besides reification and possession” (64). The establishment of the Anthropocene in early twenty-first century geology signalled a shift in ideas about human-nature relationships, albeit not quite how Haraway envisioned it a decade earlier. Overwhelmingly defined in negative terms, the Anthropocene characterises the ‘Age of Humans’ as a crisis with potentially terminal outcomes. It, however, retains its connections to the Neoplatonic ‘Great Chain of Being’ that posits the human at the top of the species triangle, only eclipsed by God and his human-shaped angels. As Kathryn Yusoff notes, the scientific literature on the Anthropocene produces “a mythic Anthropos as geological world-maker/destroyer of worlds” (Yusoff, “Anthropogenesis” 5), naturalises ““humanity (culture is made into nature) and reintroduces the nature/culture split” (6).

Environmental historian Jason W. Moore writes that the Anthropocene is a “comforting story with uncomfortable facts”, but also “a familiar story, one of Humanity doing many terrible things to Nature” (595). The origin story of the Anthropocene fits in comfortably with similar narratives that highlight a tale of human progress such as ‘Modernity’ or the ‘Age of Technology’. These stories of progress describe the rise of capitalism in the global north alongside European knowledge production. Moore points to the destructive force of the ‘age of capital’ as a central agent, preferring the name *Capitalocene* (Malm, “The Origins of Fossil Capital”) instead of Anthropocene. The Capitalocene is part of a growing list of alternative

¹³ See, for instance: Jacques Derrida’s *Writing and Difference* (1967); Michel Foucault’s *The Order of Things* (1970) on the ‘death of Man’; Luce Irigaray’s *Speculum of the Other Woman* (1974) and *This Sex Which Is Not One* (1977) on the patriarchal nature of universality as singular; Donna Haraway’s “A Cyborg Manifesto” (1985); and bell hooks’s *Ain’t I a Woman* (1981) on the human figure’s whiteness.

terms proposed by notably feminist, Marxist, posthumanist and postcolonial scholars, in order to shift the conversation away from homogeneous human impact, toward the implications of power structures such as capitalism, race, gender and speciesism. In addition to the Capitalocene, these alternatives include the *Anthrobscene* (Parikka, *The Anthrobscene*), *Chthulucene*¹⁴ (Haraway, “Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Plantationocene, Chthulucene”) *Eurocene* (Sloterdijk, “The Anthropocene: A Process-State”), *(m)Anthropocene* (Di Chiro, “Welcome to the White (m)Anthropocene?”), *Plantationocene* (Haraway et al., “Anthropologists are Talking”), *Racial Capitalocene* (Vergès, “Racial Capitalocene”) and the ‘*white supremacy-scene*’ (Mirzoeff, “It’s Not the Anthropocene”). What connects these rearticulations of the Anthropocene is a desire to unsettle the mythology of Man and a refusal to salvage him.

In these scholarly debates, “Indigenous knowledges into the contemporary discussion of the Anthropocene” (Davis and Todd 761) have often been overlooked. Heather Davis and Zoe Todd note that while an understanding of new climate disasters, ‘end of the world’ anxieties and ecological crises in the Anthropocene may seem like a recent development to the Euro-Western mind, for “plural Indigenous worlds around the entire globe several hundred years ago and right through to the 20th century” (773), the apocalypse already happened:

[T]he Anthropocene—or at least all of the anxiety produced around these realities for those Euro-western contexts—is really the arrival of the reverberations of that seismic shockwave into the nations who introduced colonial, capitalist processes around the globe in the last half-millennium in the first place. (Davis and Todd 774)

In “On the Importance of a Date, or Decolonizing the Anthropocene” (2017), Davis and Todd pointedly argue that the Anthropocene should be dated back to colonialism. More specifically, it should be dated to the ‘Orbis spike’ that geographers Lewis and Maslin locate in 1610, in the aftermath of the transportation of Africans across the Atlantic Ocean and the genocide of

¹⁴ See chapter two, “Storytelling as Anticolonial Method”, for a discussion of Haraway’s ‘Chthulucene’, which provides a material alternative to the human-centric Anthropocene. Not necessarily a ‘better’ term to describe the current epoch in its entirety, the Chthulucene is important for its move from a central human figure, toward a tentacular and watery multispecies time, and an acknowledgement of the inherent multiplicity of time and space. Haraway calls the Chthulucene a “needed third story” (*Staying* 56), alongside the Anthropocene/Capitalocene.

Indigenous peoples and dispossession of their lands and water. In what they call the ‘Orbis Hypothesis’, Lewis and Maslin pinpoint a decrease in atmospheric carbon dioxide with a low point in 1610 that represents the genocide of Indigenous peoples. The decimation of Indigenous cultures in the ‘New World’ led to a dip in hunting and farming and an increase of trees that caused the atmospheric carbon dioxide to dip to the ‘Orbis spike’ of 1610. Lewis and Maslin write that “boats have transferred organisms among once-disconnected oceans” (Lewis and Maslin 172). The movement of humans, plants and animal species between Europe and the Americas, and domesticated animals and crops in particular, represents a new distribution and “global homogenization of Earth’s biota” (172). Circa fifty million people died between 1492 and 1650, after the arrival of Europeans in the Americas. Lewis and Maslin acknowledge that the Orbis spike “implies that colonialism, global trade and coal brought about the Anthropocene” and that this “highlights social concerns, particularly the unequal power relationships between different groups of people, economic growth, the impacts of globalized trade, and our current reliance on fossil fuels” (177). By connecting the Anthropocene to the beginning of the colonial period, Lewis, Maslin, Todd and Davis move beyond the question whether we are in the Anthropocene, to how this concept “may serve to undermine the conditions that it names” (Davis and Todd 763). Davis and Todd argue that “we must expand and pluralize collective understandings of the disasters of the Anthropocene” (772) and use the name Anthropocene over other alternatives for strategic purpose. While the previously mentioned alternative names for the Anthropocene effectively renegotiate which elements of our current crises are most pertinent — the Plantationocene, while land-based, is particularly relevant to a foregrounding of the colonality of our current era but has also been critiqued for its conceptualisation of a multispecies plantation that obscures its racial politics (Davis et al.) — the problems that the Anthropocene underscores, as well as its popularity across disciplines, sustain it as a productive term for critical enquiry. Its name itself emphasises the root of the problem, as it draws the attention to the problematic nature of *anthropos* and the colonialist horrors and logics it symbolises.

An expanding body of scholarship questions the racial and colonial logics underpinning the anthropocentric Anthropocene and connects it to its most visible signs of planetary change: sea-level rise, changing and intensifying weather events, marine species extinctions, ocean acidification and associated collapses of marine environments such as coral bleaching. Davis and Todd reconnect the Anthropocene to colonialism, and acknowledge its oceanic origins: “[t]he notion of the Anthropocene-as-disaster in dominant scientific and social science discourses must also tend to the ongoing disaster of the Middle Passage” (772). Citing scholar

of English literature and Black Studies Christina Sharpe, they note that the “entanglements of space, time, and injustice in the wake of white supremacist violation are ongoing” (772). In *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (2016), Sharpe relocates Maurice Blanchot’s ‘disaster’ — the Holocaust, described by Blanchot as something that “ruins everything, all the while leaving everything intact” (Blanchot 1) — to the transatlantic slave trade:

Transatlantic slavery was and is the disaster. The disaster of Black subjects was and *is* planned; terror is disaster and ‘terror has a history’ (Youngquist 7) and it is deeply atemporal. The history of capital is inextricable from the history of Atlantic chattel slavery. The disaster and the writing of disaster are never present, are always present. (Sharpe 5, italics original)

Sharpe finds the wake of racial violence in what she calls the ‘weather’ of white supremacy, an all-encompassing total climate that produces Black death. The ‘wake’ is a watery metaphor to explain the ongoing consequences of the forced mass movement of raced bodies across large bodies of water: “*Wake: the track left on the water’s surface by a ship; the disturbance caused by a body swimming or moved, in water; it is the air currents behind a body in flight; a region of disturbed flow*” (3, italics original). Sharpe’s ‘wake’ redefines the temporality at stake in antiblackness, emphasising the ongoing and atemporal nature of the “impossible possibilities faced by those Black people who appear in the door and dwell in the wake” (105). Reinterpreting the Anthropocene via Sharpe’s wake emphasises the atemporal nature of the grief that defines this epoch of extinctions and the deaths of those whose lives are unliveable as the seas rise and the weather changes. Sharpe asks: “How might we stay in the wake with and as those whom the state positions to die ungrievable deaths and live lives meant to be unlivable?” (20-21).

The atemporal nature and singularity of antiblackness is replicated in the Anthropocene. As the seas rise, the lives of those who experience the Anthropocene’s consequences first, are swallowed up in the total climate of the Anthropocene that spares no time to grieve them but obsesses over possible economic losses, turning lives lost into the “capitalization of human misery” (Sharpe 25). The ‘wake’ of the colonial Anthropocene can be located at sea, in what Sharpe might call the ‘antiblackness’ of the Pacific Island communities losing their homes but refused entry to the settler colonial nations responsible for their loss, the antiblackness of refugees crossing dangerous seas in search of safety, turned around or left to drown, and the antiblackness of the babies born after the militarisation of island space that turned their lagoons

into toxic sites. The total weather and climate of the Anthropocene needs to account for the antiblackness of its ecologies. Kathryn Yusoff calls this a “billion Black Anthropocenes”:

Black Anthropocenes marks an interjection or erasure that is a billion missing articulations of geological events to provide a counterforce or gravity to the historical junctures from 1492 to 1950 [...] A billion Black Anthropocenes names the all too many *voidings* of experiences that span multiple scales, manifestations, and ongoing extractive economies, in terms of the materiality and grammars that inculcate antiblackness through the material geophysics of race. (Yusoff, *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None*, 13-14, italics original)

Yusoff’s ‘billion Black Anthropocenes’, Sharpe’s ‘wake’ and continued “ontological negation of being with Black subject and communities [...] the endurance of antiblackness in and outside the contemporary” (Sharpe 14) are echoed in a shift toward the material and historical rearticulation of colonial continuity in contemporary scholarship in the blue humanities, environmental humanities and ocean studies.

In what she defines as an oceanic turn or a transition to ‘critical ocean studies’, Elizabeth DeLoughrey characterises an ontological shift in the experience of oceanic spaces: “from a long-term concern with mobility across transoceanic surfaces to theorizing oceanic submersion, thus rendering vast oceanic space into ontological place” (“Submarine Futures” 32). DeLoughrey’s work has long been concerned with a juxtaposition of Caribbean and Pacific postcolonial and Indigenous literatures in relation to the ocean.¹⁵ Her work has recently turned toward connecting ‘transoceanic imaginaries’ and ‘sea ontologies’ with an analysis of the Anthropocene. In “Submarine Futures of the Anthropocene” (2017), DeLoughrey sketches the “rise of a new oceanic imaginary for the twenty-first century” (33), connecting markers of the Anthropocene, such as rising sea-levels, with the work of Caribbean writers and artists “who have long theorized the ocean in terms of the violent convergence of environment and history” (33). In her recent monograph, *Allegories of the Anthropocene* (2019), DeLoughrey defines allegory as the key technique used to tell the story of the Anthropocene. She analyses “contemporary postcolonial islands texts and contexts as a means of allegorizing the Anthropocene” (7) with particular focus on Caribbean and Pacific Island narratives that

¹⁵ See, for instance, DeLoughrey’s *Routes and Roots: Navigating Caribbean and Pacific Island Literatures* (2007).

connect those who are most visible in climate change discourse, as the people of disappearing islands, with the material-historical context of imperial expansion that brought the Anthropocene forth in the first place. Like Alaimo, DeLoughrey emphasises the materiality of the ocean in her work and approaches the ocean from a multispecies ethnographic and feminist materialist line of enquiry. She pays particular attention to the ocean as a “material entity; it is an ecology for ‘subtle and submarine’ poetics” (33), citing Saint Lucian poet and playwright Derek Walcott’s famous poem “The Sea is History”. She moves away from centralising Western theories and theorists in her work and foregrounds the work of Caribbean and Pacific artists, scholars and writers, in order to affirm the continuity, rather than the novelty, of the Anthropocene:

The lack of engagement with postcolonial and Indigenous perspectives has shaped Anthropocene discourse to claim the *novelty* of crisis rather than being attentive to the historical *continuity* of dispossession and disaster caused by empire. (DeLoughrey, *Allegories 2*, italics original)

Relinquishing the idea that the Anthropocene is a recent crisis for all humans, and instead adopting the Anthropocene as a marker of continued disasters of antiblackness and the consequences of transoceanic violence and dispossession, the following section engages specifically with scholars who approach the ocean as a ‘material entity’. Drawing on the work of feminist materialist thinkers Karen Barad, Gloria Anzaldúa, Stacy Alaimo and Astrida Neimanis, I ask what it means to embody the ocean. Feminist materialist scholarship increasingly engages with water, oceans and seas as places and material of importance to the ongoing and expanding inequalities of wet human and nonhuman bodies. Blue materialities accentuate these wet, colonial, aqueous embodiments of contemporary waters.

Blue Feminist Materialisms

Water flows through feminist enquiry in many diverse ways, taking up questions related not only to environmental degradation, but also to philosophical and epistemological frameworks, language, coloniality, biotechnology, labour mobility, sexuality and racism.

— Astrida Neimanis, “Feminist Subjectivity, Watered”

On 26 October 2020, researchers affiliated with NASA published an article in *Nature Astronomy* called “Molecular Water Detected on the Sunlit Moon by SOFIA” (Honniball et al. 2020). The outcomes had been promoted by NASA as a ‘new discovery about the surface of the moon’ a few days earlier, and the speculations about this new lunar discovery ran wild. But, rather than alien life, or a surface made of cheese, NASA scientists found evidence that there is more water on the moon than they initially thought. They already knew that water on the moon comes in the form of ice, as either crystals frozen between “grains sheltered from the harsh lunar environment” or potentially suspended “within impact glasses” (3) that establish upon the impact of micrometeorites. Long before the first humans set foot on the moon, its environments were thought of in watery and oceanic terms. On 20 July 1969, *Apollo 11* reached the moon’s surface and Neil Armstrong set foot on the *Sea of Tranquillity*, a lunar mare named in 1651 by Italian Jesuit priests and astronomers Francesco Grimaldi and Giovanni Battista Riccioli. The moon’s oceans and seas were named long before the existence of water on the moon could be proven. In Plutarch’s treatise, “On the Face of the Moon” (“De facie in orbe Lunæ”, the surviving Latin title of the original Greek work), that likely dates to the end of the 1st century CE, the moon is discussed as a second, smaller Earth, with dark regions Plutarch described as seas and oceans. Ideas about seas and oceans on the moon have since evolved in the study of the water on the moon’s surface. In modern astronomy, the search of the moon’s oceans continued and the existence of water particles on the moon has been suspected since the detection of hydrogen in the late 1990s, when an orbiting spacecraft found indications of ice near the moon’s poles. Honniball et al.’s 2020 findings not only confirmed the presence of H₂O on the ‘dark side of the moon’ — the areas the light of the sun never reaches — they also detected “widespread hydration” (1) on the sunlit surface of the moon. This water was previously thought to have evaporated because of sun exposure: ““We thought it would be lost’ to space” (Honnibal in Koren). Locating water particles on the light, Earth-facing area of the moon has important possible outcomes for future Moon exploration, as the dark and cold side of the moon is considered far more dangerous for astronauts, which makes potential water on the dark side difficult to access. Finding more water on the moon demonstrates how the materiality of water impacts political, ethical and material connections between all celestial bodies of water, on Earth and beyond.

Starting on the moon and moving to earthly waters, this section traces feminist materialist interest in ‘bodies of water’ (Neimanis, *Bodies of Water*) and ‘transcorporeality’¹⁶ (Alaimo, “Trans-corporeal Feminisms”) to conceptualise and emphasise what Stacy Alaimo calls “the material interconnections of human corporeality with the more-than-human world” (*Bodily Natures* 2). Feminist materialist theories show a renewed appreciation of the material by way of its politics, agency and ethics. In the past decade, the materiality of water has asserted itself as a topic of interest within the work of several feminist materialist theorists. Reinforcing the emphasis of this chapter on blue and wet colonialisms, in this section I articulate the connections between so-called ‘new’ or ‘feminist materialisms’, and recent oceanic or blue analyses. What I call ‘blue feminist materialisms’ demonstrates the plurality of oceanic theories. Blue feminist materialisms inspire a ‘blue reading’ that reconfigures feminist theories’ ontological relationship to wet materialities. Interdisciplinary approaches to the far-reaching coloniality of bodies of water, connect the seas and oceans to the waters on Earth and even the moon. Outside of Earth, no celestial body has native or current human populations. The colonial narratives that surround lunar and other space missions are reminiscent of similar accounts of the annexation and colonisation of the deep sea, the North and South Poles and Pacific Islands. Extending the relinquishing of the universal figure of the human to examine the antiblackness and coloniality that formed many Western oceanic imaginaries, this section starts from the idea that blue feminist materialisms can be effective in engaging posthumanist and postcolonialist ethics for a watery anticolonial future.

Before diving into deeper waters, I want to return to the moon. The October 2020 Moon announcement came at an opportune time for NASA. It sedimented connections between water and celestial colonial expansion. NASA was directed by the Trump Administration to send astronauts to the moon by 2024, as part of a program called *Artemis*. Named as the sister of the 1960s and 70s *Apollo* program, the *Artemis* Moon exploration plans to feature the first woman walking on the moon. No people have been to the moon since the last lunar landing in December 1972 — of the *Apollo 12* — after which attention and money was directed to other parts of ‘space’, such as building space shuttles, stations and large telescopes to cast the territorialising view of the United States even further into space. Throughout his 2020 U.S. presidential election campaign, Donald Trump returned to the importance of lunar exploration, moving away from the Obama-era focus on the exploration of Mars. He signed an executive

¹⁶ While initially hyphenated, as writing style shifted to less hyphenation in contemporary humanities scholarship, Alaimo and others now write the compound “transcorporeality” unhyphenated.

order in April 2020 that encourages private U.S. companies to mine the moon for minerals. The order includes mention of “commercial partners”, who are to participate in “an ‘innovative and sustainable program’ headed by the United States to ‘lead the return of humans to the Moon for long-term exploration and utilization, followed by human missions to Mars and other destinations’” (Trump and Policy Directive 1 of 11 December 2017, as cited in Trump). One of the three companies selected to work with NASA on its Artemis program is previous-Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos’ space company Blue Origin. Blue Origin is developing the descent element for the moon landing, based on its ‘Blue Moon’ lander design (see Fig. 3).



Fig. 3. **Blue Moon project.** Artist impression of the Blue Origin National Team lander on the surface of the moon, looking toward a ‘blue Earth’. Blue Origin, www.blueorigin.com/assets/photos/news/2020_04/blueorigin_hls_lander_de_ae_moon.jpg.

The clear nostalgic references to the idea of Earth as the ‘blue planet’ or a ‘blue marble’, refer to the first popularised images taken of Earth from outer space. After Bill Anders’ *Earthrise* photo, taken from the *Apollo 8* on Christmas Eve 1968, crew on the *Apollo 17* created the image of Earth that became known as the *Blue Marble* (1972). In the original image, titled *AS17-148-22727*, the southern hemisphere is visible, from Africa to Antarctica, in reverse orientation with south at the top and north at the bottom. In the original photograph (see Fig. 4), Earth is not centred as in the later popularised *Blue Marble* rendition but positioned in the

top left corner of the image, broadly adhering to the golden ratio of 1.618 to 1, leaving ample black space to offset the bright blue of Earth's oceans.



Fig. 4. **The Blue Marble.** NASA. *AS17-148-2272*, the uncropped “Blue Marble” photograph, crew of *Apollo 17*, 7 December 1972, 70mm Hasselblad, 80mm Zeiss lens. *Wikimedia Commons*. [commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Apollo_17_Blue_Marble_original_orientation_\(AS17-148-22727\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Apollo_17_Blue_Marble_original_orientation_(AS17-148-22727).jpg).

The image was cropped, inverted and distributed to the media as the *Blue Marble*. Newer versions were created from satellite imagery in 2001, 2002 and 2012. The *Blue Marble 2001-2002* and *Blue Marble 2012* versions shifted the view of Earth from Africa and Antarctica to a U.S.-centric perspective. Alongside these changes to the visual representation of Earth, the U.S. has steadily reignited its imperial lunar ambitions. The proposal of sustained U.S. lunar

presence — a Moon colony — has seen continued U.S. Republican backing and in December 2019 coincided with the establishment of a United States Space Force (USSF), a space branch of the U.S. Armed Forces, created for potential future space warfare.

The discovery of more water on the moon than suspected since the first humans set foot on its rocky surface in the 1960s has reinforced Western colonial extractivism and military responses that were thus far reserved for earthly bodies of water. The potential frozen seas on the moon illustrate that even though water is not always visible to the human eye, even celestial seas have colonial past, presents and possibly futures. While the 2021 change to a Joe Biden presidency might alter U.S. space exploration plans once again, the discovery of more water on the moon than previously considered, adds to the potential viability of these kinds of programs as private companies will be able to access and potentially profit from Moon water. It connects the materiality of both the dry and wet areas of the moon to the privatisation, militarisation and colonisation efforts of U.S. forces. The presence of lunar water invigorated the colonising fantasies of the United States, which has thus far been the only nation to set foot on the moon and has a long history of exploiting earthly spaces. The U.S. has steadily refused to sign the 1979 ‘Moon Treaty’, and the April 2020 executive order further asserts that the U.S. objects to the view of “outer space” as a “global commons” and that it will not follow customary international law.¹⁷ Naming this new attempt to colonise and privatise the moon *Artemis*, moreover, capitalises and co-opts a progressive liberal feminist logic to deflect from the potentially disastrous effects that mining on the moon will have on all human and nonhuman celestial bodies. Promoting these future space missions as a marker of gender equality obscures the gendered nature of mining. How does a material feminism interject in colonial narratives of continuous extraction of water?

Instead of drawing a straight temporal line, watery feminist materialisms are best acknowledged by attending to the many traditions that have inspired the current establishment of blue theories. There are several variations of ‘feminist materialisms’, ‘posthuman feminisms’ or ‘feminist new materialisms’, which are in close alliance on shared key issues such as agency,

¹⁷ The official name of the ‘Moon Treaty’ is the *Agreement Governing the Activities of States on the Moon and Other Celestial Bodies* and was created in 1979. There are currently eighteen parties that have signed the treaty, but none of the nations that have a declared interest or presence in space, such as the United States, Japan, Russia, the People’s Republic of China and the member states of the European Space Agency, have ratified the treaty.

responsibility, anti-humanism and decentring anthropocentrism.¹⁸ Feminist materialisms are genealogically connected to and inspired by a range of intellectual traditions, that include Black, Indigenous, postcolonial, anti- and decolonial feminisms, trans and queer feminisms, feminist technoscience studies, posthumanism, ecofeminism and environmental justice movements. Ecofeminist writing by, for instance, Val Plumwood and Greta Gaard has long questioned the idea of human mastery over ‘nature’, in particular in relation to nonhuman animals as well as to environmental justice. The genealogy of decolonial critique and theorisations of feminism, racism, Eurocentrism, imperialism, immigration and anti-capitalism includes theories from across continents and oceans. The work of for instance Linda Tuhiwai Smith, Junita Sundberg, Kimberley TallBear, Aileen Moreton-Robinson, Kyle Whyte, Chandra Mohanty and Angela Davis paved the way for anti- and decolonial ways of thinking about Earth as alive, conceptualising its materiality from non-white and/or non-Western perspectives. Caribbean decolonial philosophies and theories of creolisation by Martinique philosophers Aime Césaire, Franz Fanon and Édouard Glissant, and Barbadian poet and thinker Kamau Brathwaite, have, moreover, inspired contemporary decolonial critiques and attention to oceanic materialities. The renewed emphasis of feminist theories on materiality is just as much indebted to French feminist theories of sexual difference, such as the work of Luce Irigaray, Hélène Cixous and Julia Kristeva, and Anglo-American feminist science and technology studies (STS), such as Donna Haraway’s ‘situated knowledges’ and Sandra Harding’s ‘feminist standpoint theory’, as it is to postcolonial feminist and philosophical traditions such as Franz Fanon’s analyses of colonialism in *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), Sylvia Wynter’s critique of the Human, and Achille Mbembe’s ‘necropolitics’.

There have, moreover, been several critiques of prominent (new) materialist feminist theories and the related (but decidedly less feminist) Actor-Network Theory for their privileging of white, Western philosophy and genealogies of thought. The work of French philosopher of science and Actor-Network theorist Bruno Latour and Australian feminist philosopher Elizabeth Grosz, in particular, has come under scrutiny of both (post)colonial, Indigenous and queer criticism for its citation practices and lack of engagement with the legacies of its turn to materiality. Zoe Todd describes her frustration attending a talk by Bruno

¹⁸ See van der Tuin and Dolphijn’s “The Transversality of New Materialism” (2010) for an in-depth discussion of the origins of the term ‘new materialisms’ and its connections to several Western philosophical and feminist traditions. Hinton, Mehrabi and Barla’s “New Materialisms/New Colonialisms” (2015) surveys the connections between new materialisms and postcolonial theory.

Latour in “An Indigenous Feminist’s Take on the Ontological Turn: ‘Ontology’ is Just Another Word for Colonialism” (2016):

So, I waited. I waited through the whole talk, to hear the Great Latour credit Indigenous thinkers for their millennia of engagement with sentient environments, with cosmologies that enmesh people into complex relationships with themselves and *all* relations, and with climates and atmospheres as important points of organization and action. [...] It never came. He did not mention Inuit. Or Anishinaabeg. Or Nehiyawak. Or any Indigenous thinkers at all. (Todd, “An Indigenous Take” 6-7, italics original)

Latour’s work on the philosophy of science, the fallacy of modernity and the agency of things is considered foundational to a league of feminist materialist theories and others concerned with the agency of the nonhuman. It is a disservice to the breadth of Indigenous and non-Western thought to ignore its contributions to non-human and anticolonial thought. Continuously failing to give credit where credit is due, or only casting one’s eyes aside to the margins after centring dominant ontoepistemologies, reproduces the colonial pasts and presents that erased many Indigenous and Black people from the conversation in the first place. To return to the words of Alice Te Punga Somerville on Ocean Studies, what happens when material feminisms are instead “possessed of a genealogy that is impossibly and beautifully wide” (Te Punga Somerville 28)? Todd emphasises the responsibility of academic knowledge communities: “each one of us is embedded in systems that uphold the exploitation and dispossession of Indigenous peoples. The academy plays a role in shaping the narratives that erase ongoing colonial violence” (15).

Instead of writing about trends in contemporary research as ‘turns’ or ‘new’ movements, attention needs to be paid to the breadth and diversity of research and thought that already exists. Emphasizing polyvocal genealogies rather than ‘new ontological turns’, in “Some ‘F’ Words for the Environmental Humanities” (2017), queer ecologist Catriona Sandilands finds that some “‘material’ feminism has tended to downplay [...] earlier ethical and political concerns as part of a turn to an ontologically driven inquiry focused on the generativity, interactivity, and porosity of matter itself, without the (necessary) intervention of such power relations as gender, sexuality, class, race, and ability” (446). Acknowledging Sandilands’ argument that, unless it addresses a “strong understanding of *biopolitics* as well as becoming, *inequality* as well as intra-activity, and *precarity* as well as porousness, the material turn will

fail to live up to its promise” (448, italics original), this project aims to always look beyond a singular Western philosophical approach. I propose to follow Zoe Todd’s practical advice that “for every time you want to cite a Great Thinker who is on the public speaking circuit these days, consider digging around for other who are discussing the same topics in other ways” (Todd, “An Indigenous Take” 20). Only then can an extractive Western philosophy, that tends to mine the world for ideas and extract it as its own, make way for a situated anticolonial approach that responds to an “impossibly and beautifully wide” (Te Punga Somerville, “Where Oceans Come From” 28) material-discursive heritage. A blue feminist materialist politics of citation can only ever come close to addressing a current aqueous moment by wetting its feet and fins in several bodies of water at once.

The blue feminist materialist approach I foreground is, therefore, as attentive to Anglo-American feminist materialist theories such as Jane Bennett’s ‘vibrant matter’ and Karen Barad’s notion of ‘intra-action’ and ‘diffraction’ as it is to Chicana feminist theorist Gloria Anzaldúa’s ‘B/borderlands’, which refers to the metaphorical and geographical spaces that transform dualistic thought into a nonbinary ‘mestiza consciousness’. As I further examine in chapter six, Anzaldúa’s foundational text *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987) centres an identification with the fluidity of the borders between land and sea that forces us to re-examine the inside/outside duality of border policies. These ideas form a new mestiza consciousness, in which humanity is fluid, multiple and no longer operated by a duality of dark/light, inside/outside or a human/nonhuman divide:

[Y]ou’re all the different organisms and parasites that live on your body and also the ones that live in a symbiotic relationship to you. The mouth!!! The mouth has tons of bacteria and foreign stuff. Animals live in symbiotic relationships – the cows with little birds picking the ticks off. So who are you? You’re not one single entity. You’re a multiple entity. (Anzaldúa, *Interviews/Entrevistas* 158)

Anzaldúa’s approach to bodies as multiple affirms that humans and nonhumans are not distinct categories of life, but are intrinsically connected.

Karen Barad’s theory of diffraction is inspired by conversations with Gloria Anzaldúa, and both Barad and Anzaldúa have made waves in thinking about relationality and

materiality.¹⁹ Barad's work is often foregrounded as one of the originators of contemporary feminist (new) materialisms. Barad rearticulates materiality by moving beyond the binary division between particles and waves that defined classical physics. Barad has a background in quantum physics that informs their feminist theories, and uses waves — light, sound or water waves — as starting points to explain a theory of diffraction. The movements of ocean waves and ripples in a pond, exemplify the diffractive patterns that Barad's notion of materiality describe:

If you think about ocean waves, you see that waves often overlap with one another. They can occupy the same place at the same time; that is part of what they are famous for doing. [...] [W]hen I drop two rocks in a pond simultaneously, I get an overlapping of concentric circles. That is a diffraction pattern and what you see is that there is a reinforcing of waves. When two waves meet, crest to crest, they make a higher wave. But sometimes you get a crest meeting a trough, and they cancel out. That makes for a very different kind of pattern. (Barad in Dolphijn and van der Tuin 60)

Barad's reference to quantum physics informs a diffractive materiality that is infinite in its possibilities: "Each moment is an infinite multiplicity where other moments are here-now in particular constellations" ("After the End of the World" 525). This infinity questions the finitude of common ideas concerning origins and endings. Barad's work emphasises that entanglement is not the "joining of separate entities, but to lack an independent, self-contained existence" (*Meeting the Universe Halfway* ix). Diffraction patterns, such as those in the above example, reinforce and cancel each other out, their existence dependent on what Barad calls their "entangled intra-relating" (ix) or intra-action: "in the case of ocean waves, waves are particular disturbances of the water, not some separate entity in the water" (420n5). Waves do not start or end but superimpose and show that differences are entangled, not just figuratively, but both materially and discursively.

¹⁹ See Barad's "Diffracting Diffraction: Cutting Together Apart." *Parallax*, vol. 20, no. 3, pp. 168-187, for a detailed reading (together-apart) of Barad's notion of diffraction via Anzaldúa: "Crossroads/Diffraction: Santa Cruz and Claremont, CA 1991. I am sitting outdoors with Gloria Anzaldúa talking about quantum physics and mestiza consciousness. [...] Gloria and I talk about quantum physics, the two-slit diffraction experiment, waves and particles and *mita' y mita'*. We are happily making diffraction patterns" (172).

Stacy Alaimo draws on Barad's work to articulate a "trans-corporeal subject who is 'situated' in a more material manner, as the very substances of the world cross through her, provoking an onto-epistemology that reckons, in its most quintessential moments, with the self as the very stuff of the emergent material world" (*Exposed* 8). The notion of 'transcorporeality' stems from Alaimo's 2010 book *Bodily Natures* and refers to "the literal contact zone between human and non-human nature" (*Bodily Natures* 2). Bridging the human/nonhuman and nature/culture divide, Alaimo's notion of 'transcorporeality' is informed by Barad's infinite diffractive materiality. Alaimo's recent writing focuses on the entanglement of the human and nonhuman in the deep seas, via a critique of human mastery and speciesism, with attention to "extractive and exploitative systems of colonization" (105). She notes that a human-nature dichotomy and the extractivism it has led to is first and foremost a dominant Western way of thinking:

Rendering living creatures and ecosystems as inert resources not only parallels but also enables extractive and exploitative systems of colonization. The sense of nature as mere 'resource' for use may be utterly inimical to particular cultures, especially those of indigenous peoples, many of whom may be at particular risk from climate change. (105)

Alaimo's work is exemplary of a blue feminist materialism. With an emphasis on feminist ethical and political engagements, she draws on the more-than-human materiality of the deep and shallow seas in ways that are porous and absorb a variety of theories and materials. In the chapter "Your Shell on Acid", Alaimo argues that the "human self is permeable, part of the flux and flow of the anthropocene, part of the stuff of the world" (182). Her emphasis on the deep seas underscores that even in the deepest and most imaginatively remote places on Earth, the impacts of imposed hierarchical distinctions between human and nature are present. She argues, therefore, "for another sort of figuration of the anthropocene, which is aquatic rather than terrestrial" (161) and acknowledges that seas are not flat or timeless, but part of Anthropogenic and climate change-affected Earthly environments:

The view of the earth from space reveals merely the surface of the seas, a vast horizontal expanse that is rendered utterly negligible when one considers the unfathomable depths and three-dimensional volume of the rest of the ocean. To begin to glimpse the seas, one must descend, rather than transcend, be immersed

in highly mediated environments that suggest the entanglements of knowledge, science, economics, and power. (161)

Alaimo's focus on the deep seas justifies her obvious preference for immersion and descending into depths. However, inverting the idea of the earth as a 'Blue Marble' with glistening surfaces and looking from the seas outward, shows that human-nonhuman entanglements reach up too, connecting the depths of the sea with the far-side of the moon. Aquatic entanglements and permeability all the way up and down.

The permeability of the human body is likewise foregrounded in feminist materialist and phenomenologist Astrida Neimanis' work on 'bodies of water'. In the same-titled monograph, *Bodies of Water: Posthumanist Feminist Phenomenology* (2017), Neimanis unfolds the intricacies of bodies and their watery entanglement via, for instance, amniotic fluid, breast milk and other waters often forgotten when water becomes shorthand for H₂O. The question of difference that underlies Neimanis' work becomes wet with the materiality of human bodies as she proposes the figuration 'bodies of water' as an alternative to "dominant Western and humanist understandings of embodiment, where bodies are figured as discrete and coherent individual subjects, and as fundamentally autonomous" (2). In Rosi Braidotti's 'nomadic theory', understanding concepts as 'figurations' is a way to think of concepts as embodied. Coming from a feminist posthumanist and Deleuzian feminist background, Braidotti writes about the figuration of the nomad as a 'living map' that is concretely situated and embodied — socially and historically — and offers a way to account for the self as transformative (Braidotti 10). A figuration is a "politically informed image of thought that evokes or expresses an alternative vision of subjectivity" (22). In a section called "Learning from anticolonial waters", Neimanis contends that "[b]odies of water", the figuration that permeates her text, "invite us to amplify a relational aqueous embodiment that we already incorporate and transcorporate" (169). *Bodies of Water* does not start from Black or Indigenous thought, but looks to the potentiality of feminist posthumanisms and materialisms, in relation to similar watery issues raised by scholars, writers and artists from Black and/or Indigenous theoretical and creative traditions. The blue feminist materialisms that emerge in both Alaimo's and Neimanis' work present a 'material' or 'ontological turn' that is not 'new' but broadens perspectives from feminist theoretical traditions to a diversity of watery thought. Specific bodies of water, and what they mean to particular people and other species, are connected to the planetary condition that has too often been blinded by greed, fantasies of control, mastery and alienation.

Following the anticolonial work that has seeped into environmental scholarship more broadly, the work of feminist materialist scholars such as Alaimo and Neimanis extends feminist materialism to seas, oceans and the watery constituency of all living bodies. They create a blue feminist materialist environment that does not aim to capture water but learns from its colonial legacies to reimagine these legacies via the relentless potentiality of the ocean.

Conclusion

[I]t is most likely that a human body would not make it to the seafloor intact. What happened to the bodies? By which I mean, what happened to the components of their bodies in salt water? Anne Gardulski tells me that because nutrients cycle through the ocean [...] the atoms of those people who were thrown overboard are out there in the ocean today.

— Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*

The blue theories recounted in this chapter operate in what Christina Sharpe calls ‘the wake’ of slavery and colonialism. The colour blue, with its colonial materiality, lives on in the afterlives of our oceanic imaginaries. “The question for theory”, Sharpe writes, “is how to live in the wake of slavery, in slavery’s afterlives, the afterlife of property, how, in short, to inhabit and rupture this episteme with their, with our, knowable lives” (50). Sharpe’s work on the wake confirms that the afterlives of colonial brutality are not in the past, but very much in the present. The blue wake of the lives lost at sea and in the indigo trade reinforces the primacy that coloniality needs to take in contemporary blue environmental humanities debates.

The blue humanities bring the blue and the sea back into the humanities arena. Some inflections have tended gloss over the coloniality that underlies Western thought’s engagement with the seas, but increasingly the blue humanities build on multioceanic and multigenealogical lessons learnt from island and ocean studies to think regionally instead of universally. Feminist materialist theories could have a lot to offer current ‘oceanic’ or ‘blue turns’ in the environmental humanities, if they unsettle the centrality of the Western imaginary and multiply perspectives. In the Anthropocene, an epoch that has foregrounded the instability of the human/nature binary, moving beyond singularity and a progressive notion of time is imperative. Stacy Alaimo’s transcorporeal deep seas, Elizabeth DeLoughrey’s oceanic imaginaries and Astrida Neimanis’ bodies of water demonstrate that feminist materialist theories have the potential to move far beyond Rachel Carson’s vision of a ‘last great frontier’.

Seas and oceans have been described and used as frontiers at least since Europeans forcibly moved African people across the Atlantic Ocean and claimed the oceans that we know today. As Earth's oceans heat up, and connections between large bodies of water and life are reinforced, it is increasingly important to engage with the perspectives and work of "those who have not needed a 'turn to the sea' because we were already there" (Te Punga Somerville 28). As scholar and poet Craig Santos Perez confirms, "[t]his complicates the assumption that critical ocean studies is entirely 'new' and asks us to consider who is making the 'turn'" (Perez, "'The Ocean in Us'" 2). The following chapter extends the idea 'who' is making a 'blue turn' to 'how' a change in perspective can be communicated, for, as Donna Haraway reminds us: "[i]t matters what matters we use to think other matters with; it matters what knots knot knots, what thoughts think thoughts, what descriptions describe descriptions, what ties tie ties. It matters what stories make worlds, what worlds make stories" (*Staying with the Trouble* 12). Moving beyond the singular and limited stories that have recounted oceanic worlds, blue theories can produce different oceanic ecologies that do not erase the death and destruction that the Europeans brought across the seas.

2. Storytelling as Anticolonial Method: Unworlding the Human

But in the end [...] I have to remember the power of words. Our words are weapons too. Our books are time bombs and already are breaking down many barriers on their way across the world.

— Alexis Wright, “Politics of Writing”

In *The Mushroom at the End of the World* (2015), feminist ethnographer Anna Tsing argues that “[t]o listen to and tell a rush of stories is a *method*. And why not make a strong claim and call it a science, an addition to knowledge?” (37, italics original). This chapter focuses on the importance of storytelling as a method to disrupt normative formations of knowledge and being in Western theory and narrative. How does telling and listening to stories generate thoughts, ideas and knowledges about the ocean? And how can we define a more complex idea of storytelling that includes the vitality and ‘vibrant materiality’ (Bennett x) of more-than-human oceanic life? Combining Tsing’s attention to storytelling as method with Sylvia Wynter’s emphasis on the narrativity of Western Man and Ursula Le Guin’s ‘carrier bag theory of fiction’, I engage with storytelling as not just any method, but an anticolonial method that interrogates the lasting effects of colonialism in the Oceanic region.

The linear progress narratives embedded in Western thought “have blinded us” (viii), Tsing writes. The issue at hand is that “we have a problem with scale” (37) and that the scales of knowledges that stories create “do not nest neatly” (37). In the case of the Oceanic stories at the heart of this dissertation, the effects of colonialism are captured in ways that do not always offer happy endings, or singularly positive outcomes. They describe the scars of genocide, dispossession and occupation of people and environment as intrinsically connected. Reading, writing and listening to these stories is uncomfortable, unsettling the Western imaginary. For instance, losing Tasmanian kelp to invasive species and changing water consistencies has potential detrimental effects to both the multispecies worlds that live underwater and depend on kelp, and the cultural resurgence of Tasmanian Aboriginal communities, who use the kelp to reconnect to Sea Country.²⁰ These scales of stories “draw

²⁰ Chapter five, “Kelp Encounters”, analyses the work of Lucienne Rickard and Mandy Quadrio and they visually narrate how human and nonhuman extinctions are connected by kelp encounters.

attention to interrupting geographies and tempos. These interruptions elicit more stories” (Tsing 37). It would be too simplistic to argue that storytelling is only generative in a positive sense. The subjective power of storytelling is dependent on the perspective and standpoint of the storyteller as well as the listener. Great stories are not inherently beneficial to all, and Western thought has a prevailing legacy of telling stories that benefit the West, to the detriment of those it does not include as protagonists.

In “Unruly Edges” (2012), Tsing notes that “[s]cience has inherited stories about human mastery [...] These stories fuel assumptions about human autonomy, and they direct questions to the human *control* of nature, on the one hand, or human *impact* on nature, on the other, rather than to species interdependence” (144, italics original). As climate and environmental change moves at increasing speed and intensity, it is imperative to remember that thinking about humans as inherently destructive, or as the technosaviours of earthly futures, are normative expectations grown out of Western ontoepistemologies that applied the category of human unequally, to favour white, globally northern, male perspectives and narratives of linear progress. Ursula Heise’s “rhetoric of decline” explains how in mainstream contemporary art and literature on the Anthropocene and mass extinction the idea of the decline of nature has been told as a story of modernisation. She writes:

Many of these works deploy the genre conventions of elegy and tragedy to construct narratives in which the endangerment or demise of a particular species functions not only as a synecdoche for the broader environmentalist idea of the decline of nature, but also comes to form part of stories that individual cultures tell about their own modernization. (52)

These stories prolong the nature/culture binary, and falsely reinforce the idea of a homogenised humanity. The ‘Human’ as conceived in Western epistemologies is not a homogenous group but a figure born out of systems of exclusion, as climate change is disproportionately caused by the actions of the largely white global north.

In Oceania, storytelling and listening have long been practiced as a method to undermine colonial settler governments and their invasive practices. In two essays, “Politics of Writing” (2002) and “A Weapon of Poetry” (2008), celebrated Waanyi author Alexis Wright reflects on the politics of writing as an Aboriginal author in settler colonial Australia and pointedly argues that while we are quick to remember “the violence of long-term colonialism plaguing the country” (“A Weapon” 19), the words Aboriginal writers and thinkers are

weapons too. Inspired by the poetic and activist legacy of Oodgeroo of the Noonuccal people of Minjerribah (1920-1993),²¹ Wright notes that storytellers like Oodgeroo use “words as a shield to hold back the full effect of colonialism” and make “a weapon of poetry” (“A Weapon” 21). Oodgeroo’s “We Are Going” (1964) draws upon Aboriginal rights as inherently connected to Country. Gathering multispecies stories to turn her words into shields against colonialism, she pierces the boundaries that have continued to oppress Aboriginal people, communities and nations. In “An Appeal”, Oodgeroo writes: “Your pen a sword opponents fear, / Speak of our evils loud and clear / That all may know” (Walker 39), and calls on writers to use their pens as swords in a time “when only the very bravest were speaking out, during the decades of assimilation and integration” (Wright, “A Weapon” 20).

The poetry of Oodgeroo addresses a core element of the theories and narratives foregrounded in this dissertation: the use of storytelling as a foundational method to disrupt power structures in settler and colonised areas across Oceania. Using her writing to enact change for the benefit of Aboriginal people across the continent, Oodgeroo paved the way for contemporary writers, artists and storytellers in Australia and beyond to extend her concerns with the power structures still at play to the problems we now address under the umbrella of ‘climate change’:

The scrubs are gone, the hunting and the laughter.
The eagle is gone, the emu and the kangaroo are gone from this place.
The bora ring is gone.
The corroboree is gone.
And we are going. (Walker 25)

The theorists and writers foregrounded in this chapter show that climate change is not a ‘new normal’ or the unavoidable consequence of human life on Earth. It is a consequence of continued colonial exploitation, a foundational element of Western epistemes that can be fought and replaced by different and more capacious stories.

²¹ Until 1988, Oodgeroo Noonuccal published under the name Kath Walker, which is also the name under which she published the collection *We Are Going* in 1964. She adopted the name Oodgeroo (meaning “paperbark tree”) Noonuccal (in reference to the clan she was born into on Minjerribah in 1920) in defiance of the Member of the Order of the British Empire that she was awarded for her civic service in 1970. She returned the award in 1987, in protest of the upcoming bicentennial Australia Day celebrations that took place on the 26 January 1988 despite nationwide protests.

As discussed in more detail in chapter one, “Blue Ocean Theories”, a division between nature and culture is a Western ideology that underlies the continuity of colonialism and ecological devastation. In the anticolonial activist, arts and literary movements that ground this project, the division between nature and culture is dismantled. Starting from Tsing’s proposition to think of storytelling and listening as a method, I extend these ideas to the (settler) colonial situation in Oceania. To question not only human mastery but also its inherent coloniality, I build on Sylvia Wynter’s critique of “Human as noun” in favour of “being human as praxis” (“Human Being as Noun?” 7): the human as a storytelling species, or, what she calls *homo narrans*. While Wynter does not engage with the ocean as a site of thought in her work explicitly, her idea that the figure of the Human should come to mean more than the dominant Western ideas of ‘Man’ lends itself well to similar problems that have persisted in the Western universalisation of the ocean. In the chapters that follow this discussion of Wynter’s storytelling method, can we by extension then also engage with the ocean as praxis? In her work on the hauntings of the transatlantic slave trade, in *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (2016) Christina Sharpe posits that “the ongoing problem of Black exclusion from social, political, and cultural belonging” is “our abjection from the realm of the human” (14). How does contemporary use of storytelling renew attention to the entanglement of climate change and colonialism, via a critique of who is included in the category of human, and who is not? And what are the ethics and responsibilities involved in working with storytelling to address the problems with continued Western dominance?

In the sections that follow, the work of Sylvia Wynter, Ursula Le Guin, Donna Haraway, Thom van Dooren and Deborah Bird Rose demonstrates that telling a different story is imperative to envisioning an alternative, anticolonial future. Moreover, in the stories that stretch across bodies of water, connecting Pacific islands to the Australian continent, climate colonialism surfaces as one of the crucial stories to address the afterlife of colonialism in oceanic spaces. I introduce central ideas concerning narrative and human exceptionalism — ideas that are further expanded in the four thematic chapters that follow this chapter — and emphasise the importance of telling an alternative, but more importantly, anticolonial story for future earthly survival.

Approaching Storytelling as an Anticolonial Methodology

[A] story can allow multiple meanings to travel alongside one another; it can hold open possibilities and interpretations and can refuse the kind of closure that prevents others from speaking or becoming.

— van Dooren and Rose, “Lively Ethnography”

In “Slowly ~ Writing into the Anthropocene” (2013), the Australian-based, U.S. feminist ethnographer Deborah Bird Rose articulates how “speaking of what is beyond our ken” (8) is at once impossible and imperative. In a time of great unmaking, Rose notes, we are required to address the silences, “to address the stories that cannot be told, to write about that which we can never adequately comprehend [...] to remain true to the lives within which ours are entangled, whether or not we can accomplish great change” (8-9). Rose alludes here to the paradoxical nature of addressing ethical silences that, following James Hatley, she describes as the challenge we need to acknowledge: “to speak without over-riding that silence” (8). How can we tell the stories we have been taught to ignore? How can we write about extinction, about genocide, and other movements of mass destruction, when the foundations of Western thought and the language we use to think these thoughts with negate their inclusion? “[W]e are called to intervene, and all too often we find that we are helpless to intervene” (8), Rose writes, and continues:

Here, now, in the face of all this loss we are called to an impossible position. To turn our backs on those who are targeted for destruction, or who are abandoned on a spiral of loss dealing toward greater destruction, is to refuse the ethical call. Inevitably, of course it entails turning our backs on ourselves. To face others is to become a witness, and to experience our incapacity in this position. (8)

Working with storytelling as a method requires attention, a practice of listening and a commitment to ethics that is attuned to the responsibilities of those involved. Following Rose, it entails an openness to fundamental change. In a time that requires the increased unsettling of a fixed idea of humanity and the dominant whiteness of the Human figure, what does it mean for researchers from (settler) colonial backgrounds to question how we have performed our humanity in our research? “If”, Anja Kanngieser and Zoe Todd ask, “we admit that our presence, whether local or through invocation over distance, changes the sites we are speaking

about, then how can we orientate ourselves ethically” (Kanngieser and Todd 397)? This project and my investment in an anticolonial oceanic storytelling methodology aim to acknowledge the accountability of Western thought in (post)colonial environmental research.

My critique of the continued presence of colonialism and its influence on contemporary oceanic climate change events is (in)formed by my engagement with the visual and textual work of authors who belong to cultures and regions that I do not belong to. Foregrounding the agency of writing and how narrative can both create and undo, I aim to counteract the ‘master or hero narratives’ that anchor the status of the West as ‘rich’ and ‘developed’, the centre of ‘human rights’, and keeper of the knowledge of what it means to ‘be human’. Respecting the sovereignty of Indigenous voices and their lands and waters, I want to unsettle the idea that the West is central to the knowledge-building practices needed to stop the disastrous effects of climate change. As Zoe Todd incisively writes: “What we need are careful, plural, *hyperlocal* histories to counter the overwhelmingly white, Eurocentric understandings of global warming that erase the devastation facing minoritized communities” (Todd in Kanngieser and Todd 391, italics original). Merely advocating for a better understanding of climate change effects is not enough. Changing perspectives can leave a system or cosmology intact. The aim of this chapter, and this project as a whole, is to contribute to resisting and overthrowing the ground these ideas were built on.

As a researcher of white Dutch heritage, my investment in rearticulating the coloniality inherent in the stories that are told about oceans, is informed by my resistance to the watery narratives that have shaped me. A large part of both the historical and nationalist consciousness that framed my upbringing and education were stories about the Dutch ‘fighting the water’, building dikes and other seawalls, as well as conquering the seas. Dutch sea-expansion is still celebrated through the veneration of key figures of the transatlantic slave trade and colonial expansion in the East and West Indies. Stories that frame Piet Hein and Michiel de Ruyter, for example, as Dutch ‘sea-heroes’. My attention to narrative, begins from the desire to account for the disastrous effects of these stories of water mastery and superlative whiteness. In other words, to shift the norms toward the anticolonial is a way of using my words as a weapon against my culture’s wrongdoing, a shield against further harm and a first step in an ongoing journey to account for the colonial system built with Dutch hands and crafted in the minds of the people that came before me. In this sense, “turning our back on ourselves” (to use Rose’s words) (8) means to let go of harmful practices, break the foundations that uphold colonial worldviews and employ an expansive and critical view of the narratives that founded the worlds we come from.

This project is, moreover, an appeal to address the stories that cannot be told from the singularity of the Western origin story. Like the Dutch world of sea heroes and aspirations of never-ending capital growth, Oceania has since the arrival of Europeans (the Dutch, Spanish, Portuguese, German, English, French, etc.) been shaped and forced into similar origin stories and narratives of linear progress created to benefit Western expansion. Working with storytelling as a method requires a radical openness to what Kanngieser calls a ‘kin study’ instead of a case study: ways of thinking and doing that centre “Indigenous voices, claims, and practices (recognizing the complexities of the category of ‘Indigenous’ and the need to be capacious in thinking through the meetings of Black and Indigenous struggles); it [a kin study] centers Indigenous cosmologies and knowledges of Land and Country; it listens to stories and narratives, searching out recordings and songs, poetry, and calls for solidarity” (Kanngieser in Kanngieser and Todd 392-93). In this project, this means amplifying a range of narrative forms, from poetry, short stories, autobiography, to visual and performance art, through the stories the oceans tell. In feminist science and technology studies (STS) and the environmental humanities, thinkers such as Tsing, Haraway, van Dooren, and Rose have emphasised the agentiality of storytelling and the ethics of listening, via, for instance, what they call “becoming witness” (van Dooren and Rose 89) or the praxis of “worlding” (Haraway “SF”).

The following sections expand on these ideas to investigate what happens when the ocean is no longer seen as only a place of containment, but also as an expansive site of rearticulation. What Wynter calls *homo narrans*, the human as a storytelling species, informs a hybrid praxis of being human that unravels the conceptual confines of Western man. And following from Wynter’s storytelling foundations, Le Guin’s ‘carrier bag theory of fiction’ dismantles Western stories of sea heroes to “a new story [...] [a]nd yet old” (Le Guin, “Carrier Bag Theory” 151) that carries, gathers and shares.

A Verb, a Praxis: Sylvia Wynter and the Storytelling Human

[I]n every form that is being inscribed, each of us is also in that form, even though we do not *experience* it. So the human story/history becomes the collective story/history of these multiple forms of self-inscription or self-instituted genres, with each form/genre being adaptive to its situation, ecological, geopolitical.

— Sylvia Wynter in Wynter and Scott, “The Re-Enchantment of Humanism”

In conversation with Katherine McKittrick, recorded in an article titled “Unparalleled Catastrophe for Our Species? Or to Give Humanness a Different Future: Conversations” (2015), Sylvia Wynter poses that “for us to deal with global warming, this will call for a far-reaching transformation of knowledge” (24). The epistemological shift she refers to lies at the heart of her work and indicates her revolutionary intentions. Wynter is a Jamaican anticolonial cultural theorist, novelist and playwright, born in 1928. She has written an extensive oeuvre, spanning the early 1960s to the present, of theoretical and creative work that addresses how systems of exclusion are foundational to the conception of the human, via what she calls ‘Man’, and the worldview that accompanies him. In her writing, Wynter proposes a redefined humanity via storytelling. Wynter’s humanity negates the limitations and exclusionary patterns of the human as it has been defined in Western theory. This move, in particular, is important for the crucial role narratives take in this project and my focus on how storytelling from Oceania addresses the interrelation of climate change and colonialism through oceanic connections. To better understand how stories and art from Oceania unsettle hegemonic narratives of oceans as alien or colonial frontiers, I analyse key points in Wynter’s work. Breaking with the narratives that have founded Western theory is not only possible, but imperative to generate a future beyond the confines of colonialism.

Wynter’s earlier writing is Caribbean-focused, but from the 1970s onward, she expands her analysis of colonialism in the Caribbean and Americas to a critique of Western reason, and asks what it means to be human. Her work is expansive and provides intricate historical analyses, and the summary of her ideas in this chapter will not suffice to convey the depth of reason with which she disentangles the history of Western epistemes. As David Scott notes: “the scale and ambition of [her] project is as vast as it is complex” (Scott in Wynter and Scott 121). Inspired by other Caribbean thinkers such as Franz Fanon, Aimé Césaire, and Édouard Glissant, who were her contemporaries, Wynter’s oeuvre offers a historical analysis of why the figuration of Man, which has come to stand in for a whitewashed ‘humanness’ has rendered other ways of knowing unthinkable. Identifying 1492 and the arrival of Columbus in the Americas as the year that created what she calls ‘Man1’, Wynter argues that what has become known as the ‘modern Human’ is the product of a series of epistemic shifts. The afterlife of the European colonisation of the Americas lives on today in the systems of knowledge production and epistemic categories shaping our worldview. Wynter goes beyond pointing out the coloniality and limitations of these worldviews. Argentine critic of the “modern/colonial world system” (“The Geopolitics” 60), Walter D. Mignolo, writes:

Wynter is not proposing to contribute to and comfortably participate in a system of knowledge that left her out of humanity (as a black/Caribbean woman), but rather delink herself from this very system of knowledge in order to engage in epistemic disobedience. (“Sylvia Wynter” 106)

Reminiscent of Audre Lorde’s famous statement that “the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house” (“The Master’s Tools” 112), Wynter argues that “the mere negation of ‘white power’” (“Creole Criticism” 13) — only flipping the script and replacing the power of whiteness with blackness — perpetuates the practise of exclusion that has become normalised through the origin stories of Western modernity.

Wynter’s ‘epistemic disobedience’ takes the form of rearticulating what it means to be human by proposing that we must “now collectively undertake a rewriting of knowledge as we know it” (Wynter in McKittrick and Wynter 18). Unlike theories of posthumanism, her work does not aim to go ‘beyond the human’, and it could therefore perhaps be described as ‘humanist’. However, this does not mean that Wynter’s theories are inherently speciesist, or advocate for other flawed classical Humanist tenets such as the perpetuation of human exceptionalism. As Kaiser and Thiele note: “Wynter considers the *specificity* of being human; she does not deny — to borrow a phrase from Karen Barad — that we are ‘of the world in its dynamic specificity’” (Kaiser and Thiele 412n9, italics original). The Man/human figures Wynter describes present a genealogy of human ontologies that she critiques as the ‘overrepresentation of Man’, Man being the only available version of a universalising humanness. Mignolo writes: “What she proposes, overall, is a shattering of the imperial concept of Humanity based on the idea of White Man, and to reconceptualize it not by providing a new definition or image but by starting with the question: What does it mean to be Human?” (“Sylvia Wynter” 122). Man1 is the first of the European figures, Wynter writes, that came to stand in for ‘the human’ as a whole, post-1492. In “1492: A New World View” (1995), she points to the ontological shift that came into being with the creation of the modern state:

In the context of this ‘general upheaval’ (and therefore of the transformation of the divinely ordained feudal order into the new one of the modern state), Europe, by means of its return to its hitherto stigmatized pagan Greco-Roman systems of knowledge and learning, was to remake itself anew in all the forms of its existence. (Wynter, “1492” 17)

Moving from a Latin-Christian, theologically-oriented worldview to the science and colony-obsessed Renaissance, Wynter uncouples the human from the idea of Man via what she calls Man1 and Man2 in their different historical inflections. The narratives that have shaped ‘Man’, Kaiser and Thiele note, are “still hegemonic today, despite shifts and adjustments over time” (407). The first figure that came to stand in for a universal humanity, Man1, is characterised by “the colonization of time, the colonization of space, and the perfection of geometric forms that have been immortalized in the famous *Vitruvian Man*” (Mignolo, “Sylvia Wynter” 109, *italics original*), in effect, creating a concept of the human that “served to legitimate the epistemic foundation that created it” (109). Because the concept of Man1 was sustained by the very system that brought it into being, the exclusionary logic it was founded on, and the systemic erasure of Blackness in particular, have been essential to the conceptualisation of modern Man and the ontologies that he perpetuated.

The advent of the bio-centric *homo oeconomicus*, Wynter’s ‘Man2’ — “the virtuous breadwinner, the stable job holder, the taxpayer, the savvy investor, the master of natural scarcity” (McKittrick in McKittrick and Wynter 18) — replaced the rationalism of Man1 with a Darwinian paradigm founded on the idea that “some humans can be selected by Evolution” whereas others (and Blackness specifically) “can be dysselected by Evolution” (Wynter, “Unsettling” 315). This second category of Man, the “bio-economic man” (318), becomes a new dominant narrative and “marks the assumed naturalness, which positions economic inequities, ‘natural selection’, and concepts such as the free market not in the realm of divine design [...] but beyond the reach of human intervention all the same” (Weheliye 323). This revision of the human into first and foremost a biological species was fuelled by the conceptual space that was opened through the institutionalisation of scientific knowledge. Wynter argues:

This conceptual space provided a context for the biological sciences in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries to become increasingly institutionalized [...] to make possible Darwin’s epistemological rupture or leap—that is, its far-reaching challenge to Christianity’s biblical macro-origin story’s theocosmogonically projected divinely created divide between an ostensibly generically Christian mankind, on the one hand, and all other species, on the other. (Wynter in McKittrick and Wynter 16)

The overrepresentation of Man produced what W.E.B. Du Bois identifies as the ‘Color Line’, that, in Wynter’s words, encapsulates the nonhomogeneity of humankind, embodied in Man² via human skin tones: “a line drawn between the lighter and the darker peoples of the earth, and enforced at the level of social reality by the lawlikely instituted relation of socioeconomic dominance/subordination between them” (Wynter, “Unsettling” 310). These instituted hierarchies formed a new global order — race — and inscribed the story that “genetic perfection (eugenicity)” (“1492” 43) behaved along evolutionarily determined colour lines. Wynter argues that Darwin’s theories of evolution, and their subsequent translation into a concept of the human as a purely biological being, “is a descriptive statement *about which* our present globally extended and hierarchized, Western world-systemic societal order enacts and replicates itself as a self-organizing and autonomously functioning autopoietic eusocial system” (Wynter in McKittrick and Wynter 29, italics original). To counter the continued hegemonic presence of Man² in our current knowledge systems, Wynter asks what comes “after Man” (“Unsettling” 257). She proposes an alternative, hybrid notion of humanness, that is characterised by the idea “that we are *simultaneously* storytelling *and* biological beings” (Wynter in McKittrick and Wynter 29, italics original).

Wynter’s argument that “with being human *everything is praxis*” (Wynter in McKittrick and Wynter 34, italics original) is reminiscent of Judith Butler’s analysis that considers ontologies as normative injunctions. As Butler writes in *Gender Trouble* (2002), ontologies are not a priori foundations. They, rather, insert themselves into discourse by their positioning as the ground that discourse is founded upon. With respect to the ‘ontology of gender’, Butler writes:

There is no ontology of gender on which we might construct a politics, for gender ontologies always operate within established political contexts as normative injunctions, determining what qualifies as intelligible sex, invoking and consolidating the reproductive constraints on sexuality, setting the prescriptive requirements whereby sexed or gendered bodies come into cultural intelligibility. Ontology is, thus, not a foundation, but a normative injunction that operates insidiously by installing itself into political discourse as its necessary ground. (202-203)

By extension, via Wynter, the idea of ontologies as normative injunctions can be interpreted as a function of storytelling. Like gender, ‘being human’ is a praxis that creates the human and

sustains it. By insisting upon and reinforcing narratives founded in exclusion, Man1 and Man2 became human through negation. In a play on the shared etymology of the words ‘gender’ and ‘genre’, Wynter reflects on Butler’s theory of gender performativity to say that “the enactments of such gender roles are always a function of the enacting of a specific *genre* of being hybridly human. Butler’s illuminating redefinition of gender as a praxis rather than a noun, set off bells ringing everywhere!” (Wynter in McKittrick and Wynter 33, italics original). Crucially, Wynter connects the ontological question that investigates what and who the human is to the ways it has been rendered intelligible. As Denise Ferreira da Silva writes:

What is her radical move here? She begins with the ontological question—that which ponders human existence and who/what we are—*alongside* ‘the idea of race’. (Da Silva 93, italics original)

With race being a symbol of coloniality, Da Silva notes that Wynter demonstrates how the “account of the Human” is “always already an effect of coloniality” (Da Silva 101). Race is the naturalised and normative governing principle of the Human, and the world of bio-centric Man2 we currently live in. This world remains defined by the origin story that draws a hierarchical line between lighter and darker skin tones.

Wynter’s alternative conceptualisation of *homo narrans* — the human as a storytelling species — explains how she moves beyond the notion of Man1 and Man2 to rearticulate the specificity of the human species as doing, a *praxis*, instead of the Human as noun, or as a static or a priori ontological being. Wynter’s storytelling human has the potential to be revolutionary and give rise to alternatives to the exclusionary logic that sustained Man1 and Man2. In response to the need for an epistemic shift, Wynter writes that we need ‘a new poetics’ of the human as an “auto-instituting because self-inscripting mode of being [...] the poetics, in effect, of a hybrid *nature-culture*, *bios/logos* form of life bio-evolutionarily preprogrammed to institute, inscript itself, (by means of its invented origin narratives up to and including our contemporary half-scientific, half-mythic origin narrative of *Evolution*)” (“Africa” 26, italics original). Emphasising that Western Man, too, is a narrative being, characterised by the knowledges and narratives it created for itself, Wynter shows how these narratives can become undone:

We must now collectively undertake a rewriting of knowledge as we know it.
This is rewriting in which, inter alia, I want the West to recognize the

dimensions of what it has brought into the world—this with respect to, inter alia, our now purely naturalized modes or genres of humanness. You see? Because the West *did* change the world, *totally*. (Wynter in McKittrick and Wynter 18, italics original)

In Wynter's call to rewrite the episteme of modern Man, the first step toward change is to recognise the particular function Western narratives have played in the creation of a total ideology of the human. Once we are aware how all-encompassing the origin stories of Western humanness have become, these narratives can be broken down and replaced. As with previous epistemic shifts, a rupture needs to take place that makes these changes unavoidable and "inevitable" (Wynter in McKittrick and Wynter 18). Like the new astronomy of Copernicus and the birth of Western science that ruptured the stability of the divide between Heaven and Earth, Wynter proposes to rupture and erode the foundations of Man. The challenge we face now, Wynter writes, "can be likened to that made by Copernicus when he declared that, while it may *seem* absurd, the Earth indeed also moves!" (14, italics original).

Following Wynter, in the chapters that follow this methodology, I want to contribute to the shattering of colonial and Western-centric concepts, and alter our narrative conception of the ocean. Can the ocean, like the human, be engaged with as a praxis? Returning to the quote with which I opened my discussion of Wynter's work — in which she states that "for us to deal with global warming, this will call for a far-reaching transformation of knowledge" (Wynter in McKittrick and Wynter 24) — the narratives at the heart of these chapters investigate what a shift in oceanic narratives means for the conceptualisation of global climate change events. When Man is removed from the throne of his own making, what it means to be human becomes redefined through the plurality of human and nonhuman narratives. Moving away from the biocentricity of Man², toward an understanding of species as a hybrid naturecultural praxis, as Kaiser and Thiele note, "does not gesture towards a new universal" (Kaiser and Thiele 412). Thinking of species as a hybrid praxis highlights "the complicated relationalities and co-implicatedness that make 'us' as species, and as such, it can help to transmute how 'we' relate to — and therefore narrate — what it means to be human, with/in our habitats" (412).

Wynter's work confirms that a change in our imagination of the waters of the world and our praxis of oceanic storytelling needs to start with a rupture in the knowledges that have sustained dominant Western ideologies up to this point. The hybrid narrative praxis that accompanies what it means to be human shows that storytelling has the ability to create meaning but that it has also been employed to render other narratives unintelligible. In this

latter sense, narratives have been used to exclude, but could be employed to break foundational ontoepistemologies and shift perspectives toward “a humanness unmoored from the violent limitations of Man” (Ansfield 138). To follow Wynter’s anticolonial articulation of the human as autopoietic, forming and reforming itself, means that we are able to advocate for and set in motion different epistemic imaginations. Now that we are aware of the dominant narratives that enforce limitations on what could be included in the ‘realm of the human’, what comes next? How can we imagine and shape an anticolonial praxis of being human in this world?

Carrying Stories and (Un)Worlding the Seas

To me the important thing is not to offer any specific hope of betterment but, by offering an imagined but persuasive alternative reality, to dislodge the mind, and so the reader’s mind, from the lazy timorous habit of thinking that the way we live now is the only way people can live. It is that inertia that allows the institutions of injustice to continue unquestioned.

— Ursula Le Guin, “A War Without End”

In “The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction” (1989), U.S. feminist science fiction writer Ursula Le Guin advocates for feminist origin stories that move away from imperialist ‘Hero’ narratives and their tendencies to break, kill and exclude. For Le Guin, leaving the narratives behind that, as Donna Haraway phrases it, “reveal secrets acquired by heroes pursuing luminous objects across and through the plot matrix of the world” (Haraway, “Otherworldly Conversations” 160), is important. It “grounds me, personally”, she writes, “in human culture in a way I never felt grounded before” (Le Guin, “Carrier Bag Theory” 150) to write stories that “describe what is in fact going on, what people actually do and feel, how people relate to everything else in this vast sack, this belly of the universe, this womb of things to be and tomb of things that were, this unending story” (154). What Le Guin calls the ‘carrier bag theory of fiction’ is a way of relating differently via storytelling: to understand how stories can and have always already been more than triumphant narratives about winners and conquerors. Her carrier bag theory connects and brings stories together. Expanding on Wynter’s theories of *homo narrans*, and relate these ideas to feminist and environmental humanities ideas about storytelling, I analyse how in the work of Le Guin and Haraway storytelling emerges as a disruptive force to the normative formation of Western ideologies. Storytelling as a way to gather and collect can be used to generate better stories for the future and render stories that do nothing more than destroy unthinkable.

To move away from the Hero narrative, Le Guin emphasises the long story of human evolution. She describes the connecting energy of the bag, the basket, the sling that brings and holds stories together:

Before — once you think about it, surely long before — the weapon, a late, superfluous tool; long before the useful knife and ax; right along with the indispensable whacker, grinder, and digger — for what's the use of digging up a lot of potatoes if you have nothing to lug the ones you can't eat home in — with or before the tool that forces energy outward, we made the tool that brings energy home. (151)

Like Wynter, Le Guin builds on evolutionary theory to ask what it means to be human beyond modern conventions. Reminiscent of what Wynter calls the modern epistemes of Man and his progressive narratives, Le Guin emphasises that it is not the Hero that makes the story, with his pointy weapons and “imperial nature and uncontrollable impulse, to take everything over and run it while making stern decrees and laws to control his uncontrollable impulse to kill it” (152). Rather, what defines the human for Le Guin, is the way we gather stories, in bags with holes in them, porous sacks, carrier bags in which words, things, ideas and meanings slip in and out, and come together:

A leaf a gourd a shell a net a bag a sling a sack a bottle a pot a box a container.
A holder. A recipient. (150)

Not all stories, however, are useful to carry and reflect the multiplicity and entanglements of what is to come in this increasingly slippery water world.

It is important to consider which stories slip in and out of the carrier bag of our current times, and which ones stick around. The normative expectations that underlie dominant narrative climate change conventions, for instance, include the homogenising story of ‘the human’, interpreted as the entire *homo sapiens* species, as the cause of global environmental change. Arguing against the narrative of human distinctiveness in favour of how “the very notion of the human [...] has been produced and enforced across modernity” (19), in *Unthinking Mastery* (2018) Juliette Singh writes:

This is a moment in which human-induced ecological catastrophe is both in effect and immanent, in which human population displacement and species extinctions have become normative expectations. It is a moment, in other words, when human practices of mastery fold over onto themselves and collapse. (19)

Singh emphasises that the idea of the ‘human as master’ has started to become undone. This undoing leaves us renewed opportunities to question which stories carry and sustain the idea of the human as the ‘master of Nature’ and how we might tell these stories differently. Rewriting the narrative to look toward alternative ways of being human that do not rely on human exceptionalism and race as foundational concepts of the modern human is imperative to address the systemic urgency of climate and environmental change. Le Guin’s carrier bag theory gathers previously excluded but entirely relevant stories. “The life story”, Le Guin writes, is “unfamiliar, it doesn’t come easily”, even though “[p]eople have been telling the life story for ages, in all sorts of words and ways” (“Carrier Bag Theory” 152). Building on Elizabeth Fisher’s discussion of human evolution and the idea that the first human cultural device “must have been a container to hold gathered products and some kinds of sling or net carrier” (Fisher, as cited in Le Guin, “Carrier Bag Theory” 150), Le Guin argues that human storytelling does not inherently revolve around the stereotypical hero narrative. Instead, she suggests that the first stories were gathered. They were a carrier bag of stories, porous sacks that held in them narratives “conceived as carrier bag/belly/box/house/medicine bundle [...] necessary elements of a whole which itself cannot be characterized either as conflict or as harmony, since its purpose is neither resolution nor stasis but continuing process” (153).

Le Guin’s carrier bag theory of fiction has found a home with several Western feminist and environmental cultural theorists, including Donna Haraway. Known for her standpoint theory and feminist revision of the nature/culture debate, Haraway adopts Le Guin’s ‘carrier-bag practice of storytelling’ in her recent work that reconfigures earthly relationships in times of upheaval. In *Staying with the Trouble* (2016), Haraway focuses on ‘sym-poiesis’, making together, and “making kin and making kind” (103). Where Wynter emphasises the autopoietic nature, the self-making capabilities of the human, Haraway foregrounds the communal aspects of storytelling and the responsibility — “response-ability” (130) — to inherit and reweave “ongoing webs of affective and material relationships” (216n8): reweaving the carrier bag, so to speak. Haraway’s and Le Guin’s critiques of western hero narratives and human exceptionalism are heavily inspired and dependent on Indigenous scholarship and activism, a genealogy that in Haraway’s recent writing has become more explicitly acknowledged.

Haraway's critique of the nature/culture binary and break with the centrality of the human in the formation of the Anthropocene makes way for her articulation of an alternative figuration for this epoch: the Chthulucene.

Haraway's rearticulation of the Anthropocene as the Chthulucene foregrounds the importance of storytelling in the environmental humanities, in what might create a bridge between Wynter's rearticulation of the storytelling human and Haraway's nonhuman storying of the seas. In the Chthulucene the interweaving between narrative and sea is prominent. Haraway articulates the Chthulucene as a tentacular time and an unheroic 'worlding'. Unlike Wynter, who rearticulates the specificity of the storytelling human, Haraway's focuses on the inherent entanglement and materiality of life in all its vibrant narratives, across and beyond species boundaries. In earlier work, such as *The Companion Species Manifesto* (2009) and *When Species Meet* (2010), Haraway argues for a theory of 'companion species'. Initially focusing on human-dog relationships, Haraway writes that the human emerges with the dog, as companions in "co-constitutive relationships in which none of the partners pre-exist the relating" ("Cyborgs to Companion Species" 300). Alongside other thinkers of feminist materialisms such as Karen Barad and Jane Bennett, Haraway points out that the human emerges in both vital and deadly ways with other organisms: "species of all kinds are consequent upon worldly subject- and object-shaping entanglements" (*Staying* 13). Her latest work on the Chthulucene extends the idea of living with all sorts of kin and kind, from the terrestrial nonhuman to the seas.

Sea creatures are Haraway's companion species for the Chthulucene: "Corals align with octopuses, squids, and cuttlefish. Octopuses are called spiders of the seas, not only for their tentacularity, but also for their predatory habits. The tentacular chthonic ones have to eat; they are at table, *cum panis*, companion species of terra" (*Staying* 55, italics original). Haraway is drawn to corals and reefs as a material metaphor for the Anthropocene's limited understanding of intra-active²² and symbiotic relationships that transgress species boundaries. "Coral, along with lichens", she writes, are "the earliest instances of symbiosis recognized by biologists [...]" These critters taught people like me that we are all lichens, all coral" (72). The death of corals is one of most visible signs of oceanic climate change; bleached white corals of famous reefs such as the Oceanic Great Barrier Reef have come to stand in for environmental change on a

²² Intra-action is a neologism of Karen Barad that Haraway has adopted in her work — a term used to distinguish from and replace 'interaction'. Where interaction assumes "separate individual agencies that precede their interaction", intra-action "*signifies the mutual constitution of entangled agencies*" (*Meeting the Universe Halfway* 33, italics original).

global scale. Dying and bleached coral reefs narrativize and visualise the speed with which oceans have changed, via the “ghostly white skeletons of bleached and dead or dying coral” (45). The destruction that takes place is not the only story we can tell about coral. The idea of unworlding the “self-certain” stories that have informed common conceptions of modernity and the Anthropocene is central to Haraway’s argument that there are different stories to be told of the ongoing sympoietic relationships represented in coral reefs:

Both the Anthropocene and the Capitalocene lend themselves too readily to cynicism, defeatism, and self-certain and self-fulfilling predictions, like the “game over, too late” discourse I hear all around me these days, in both expert and popular discourses, in which both technothocratic geoengineering fixes and wallowing in despair seem to coinfect any possible common imagination. (56)

It is not too late for change, and for Haraway change takes the form of the imagination and storytelling: “coral and lichen symbionts [...] bring us richly into the storied tissues of the thickly present Chthulucene, where it remains possible—just barely—to play a much better SF game, in a nonarrogant collaboration with all those in the muddle” (56). Haraway proposes the Chthulucene as a “needed third story, a third netbag for collecting up what is crucial for ongoing, for staying with the trouble” (55). The narrative edge that the chthonic ones bring to Haraway’s revised epoch is that they renew alliances on Earth, telling stories of tentacularity and how humans do not own the world, but are *of and with* the world. For the stories to neither overflow nor slip through the gaps of this third netbag, they need to be “just big enough” (101). In *Minimal Ethics for the Anthropocene*, Joanna Zylińska writes of ‘the Goldilocks principle’ to think about the scale of universality:

The role of Goldilocks in thinking on the universal scale is to make us aware of our own derangements when sliding up and down the historical or even geological pole all too smoothly, to recognize some blockages on it, and to add some stoppage points herself. It is therefore to provide a ‘just right’ assessment of universality. (Zylińska 31)

Haraway agrees that “we need stories (and theories) that are just big enough to gather up the complexities and keep the edges open and greedy for surprising new and old connections” (*Staying with the Trouble* 101). We need to subvert scale and pay attention to more than the

large globalising stories and look at more than the small local stories without engaging with the bigger picture. The four thematic chapters that follow engage with worlds that are both big and small. Without aiming for a universality that flattens, my analysis follows local, regional and global connections that are needed to draw out the depths of entangled worlds.

Worlding is Haraway's way of verbalising the praxis of being in "ongoing, noninnocent, interrogative, multispecies getting on together" (29). Like Le Guin, who writes that "[a] book holds words. Words hold things. They bear meanings." (Le Guin 153), Haraway's worldings are narrative affairs. Reminiscent of Wynter's notion of the human as praxis, Haraway's notion of 'world' is a doing and a verb:

the world is a verb, or at least a gerund; worlding is the dynamics of intra-action [...] and intra-patience, the giving and receiving of patterning, all the way down, with consequences for who lives and who dies and how. (Haraway "SF")

Haraway's nonbinary approach to thinking as doing/doing as thinking extends to her articulation of worlds. The making of patterns is not innocent but creates and extends worlds, just as much as it has the potential to 'unworld' them.

In "Lively Ethnography: Storying Animist Worlds" (2016), Thom van Dooren and Deborah Bird Rose emphasise the care and concern needed to understand the entangled nature of telling stories: "[t]elling stories has consequences, one of which is that we will inevitably be drawn into new connections and, with them, new accountabilities and obligations" (89). Van Dooren and Rose call this worldly responsibility and ongoing ethical collaboration 'becoming-witness', which they explain as a combination of attention and expression: "to stand *as* witness and actively to *bear* witness. As we are seized, so we bear witness in order that others may be seized, telling stories that draw audiences into others' lives in new and consequential ways, stories that cultivate the capacity for *response*" (89, italics original). In other words, the stories we tell, whether they are concerned with corals, oceans, humans or nonhumans, must draw us in to bear witness and take responsibility for telling stories ethically and with concern for the worlds we bring together.

Storytelling is an active way of responding to the entanglements that are shaping our worlds. Reminiscent of Wynter's call for a "far-reaching transformation of knowledge" (Wynter in McKittrick and Wynter 24), the narratives we tell about the human, Haraway's unworlding and reworlding practices carry the potential to unmake the narratives that have

dominated modern Western imaginations. Like Wynter, Haraway attests that these dominant ideas can be made ‘unthinkable’. In *Staying with the Trouble*, she asks:

What happens when human exceptionalism and the utilitarian individualism of classical political economics become unthinkable in the best sciences across the disciplines and interdisciplines? Seriously unthinkable: not available to think with. (57)

Unmooring the idea that we are stuck in an endless feedback-loop of Western colonial and capitalist imaginations, Haraway emphasises that it matters what stories we tell, and which ideas and thoughts we use, witness, and express through them: “It matters what stories make worlds, what worlds make stories” (*Staying* 12).

Following Haraway, Le Guin and Wynter, the stories we gather have the potential to bring about the end of dominant Western narratives of modernity and endless progress via oceans of extractive possibilities, though this is no easy task. “I said it was hard to make a gripping tale of how we wrested the wild oats from their husks, I didn’t say it was impossible” (153), Le Guin writes toward the end of “The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction”. Indeed, unthinking the dominant ideologies that shape Western oceanic thought is easier said than done. But by gathering stories that tell of different worlds, and becoming-witness to worlds that tell different stories, a first step can be taken to unworld and unthink the colonial legacies of oceanic thought.

Conclusion

And always remember: *if you*

can write the ocean we will never be silenced.

— Craig Santos Perez, “The Pacific Written Tradition”

Storytelling as an anticolonial method lies at the heart of this project. Born in the afterlives of colonialism but soaked in the specificity of their oceanic locations and heritage, the stories that shape the chapters that follow, demonstrating that by changing the story, we can change and unthink dominant Western colonial narratives. “[T]he Hero does not look well in this bag”, Le Guin writes, “[h]e needs a stage or a pedestal or a pinnacle” (“Carrier Bag Theory” 153). The alternative I propose, following Le Guin, is to gather stories, mine and those already told by others, to show how in a big bag of stories that connect oceans to climate colonialism, ‘sea heroes’ are dethroned.

The oceanic stories that shape this project analyse the colonial oceanic scales of mining, nuclear testing, militarisation, extinction and migration from specific places, times and human/nonhuman entanglements. They critique the mastery of Western, colonial Man to make way for other gatherings of stories that better engage the nonhierarchical and nonlinear nature of anticolonial storytelling needed for our earthly futures. On the ethics of storytelling, van Dooren and Rose write: “good storytelling is generative—we don’t know quite where it will take us” (91). What we do know is that where we are is unsustainable. This story needs to change.

Like the blue ocean theories discussed in chapter one, stories that recentre multispecies and non-Western ocean relationships are changing how we can think about the ocean. The stories from Oceania that inform this project show that addressing the colonial origins of Western oceanic engagement is crucial to telling a better story for the future. Becoming witness and listening to the words and ideas of people whose lives have been entangled with Oceanic waters for centuries, resurfaces the problems of colonialism, but may also offer ways to leave the colonial behind.

3. Mining Ocean Islands: Shadow Places and Queer Black Futurism in the Short Fiction of Ellen van Neerven and Gina Cole

An ecological re-conception of dwelling has to include a justice perspective and be able to recognise the shadow places, not just the ones we love, admire or find nice to look at.

— Val Plumwood, “Shadow Places and the Politics of Dwelling”

In the posthumously published “Shadow Places and the Politics of Dwelling” (2008), Australian ecofeminist philosopher Val Plumwood writes that we should not forget about “shadow places” (147). Shadow places are the myriad of places, the multiplicity of regions and people that support the existence of others: “the places that take our pollution and dangerous waste, exhaust their fertility or destroy their indigenous or nonhuman populations in producing our food, for example” (147). What about, she argues, these ‘shadow places’; how do these locations in the shadows bear the costs of sustaining the places that we, people and nations in the West, “love, admire or find nice to look at” (139)? In the islands and coastal regions that this chapter discusses via Ellen van Neerven and Gina Cole’s short fiction, I address regions that represent such ‘shadow places’, as Plumwood suggests. At the edges of land and ocean, the shadow places invoked in van Neerven and Cole’s texts generate blue ocean stories that call attention to the edges and the in-between and change the way we can think of Ellen van Neerven’s “Water” (2014) and Gina Cole’s “Melt” (2016) narrate the consequences of mining sand in the coastal and island regions of Minjerribah, a sand island in the Quandamooka/Moreton Bay region of eastern Australia, and mining phosphates on Banaba, a raised-coral island in the Pacific Ocean.²³ How do these stories address the ramifications of colonial imperial mining practices? And how can we relate to the complexities of belonging and place via these stories’ characters, whose homes have become shadow places to sustain Western capitalist consumption?

²³ Banaba is also known by its colonial name, Ocean Island, that it received in 1804 from Captain John Mertho who named it after his ship, the *Ocean*. Both names — Banaba and Ocean Island — are in use. Generally, the English colonial Ocean Island is used to refer to its past status as a British colony while Banaba refers to its Indigenous past and present and to its island properties.

The twenty-first century has seen an upheaval of interest in the 'local' as an alternative to the late twentieth century age of 'globalisation'. From local produce at farmer's markets, the local environment to local arts and crafts, Plumwood calls upon examples of the contemporary veneration of the local to raise environmental justice concerns that challenge us to think beyond the places right outside our front doors. She notes that a lack of attention to the inherent multiplicity of both "homeplaces" (139) and shadow places creates further division and advances the already unequal impact of climate change. A storied connection to lands, waters, species and communities is crucial for meaning-making and imagining different futures in the Anthropocene. However, Plumwood argues, "if commodity culture engenders a false consciousness of place, this meaning can be fake" (139). In response to dominant global ideals around 'belonging', 'place' and 'homeplace', Plumwood questions the growing trend of place-based thought in environmentalist theory and practice.

To only care about 'one's own place' simplifies a notion of place into singularity. It thereby eludes the care, knowledge and responsibility required toward the "many unrecognised, shadow places that provide our material and ecological support" (139). In other words, to love one's own place is seldom innocent, particularly when it comes to the appreciation of the local within contemporary Western discourse. The dichotomy between "a singular, elevated, conscious 'dwelling' place and the multiple disregarded places of economic support is one of the most important contemporary manifestations of the mind/body split" (146). If our love of 'home' comes at the expense of other places, is it ever more than "the environmental project simplified down to one of increasing attachment to and care for 'one's own place'" (140)? Where do the fertilisers that help to grow your local vegetables come from? Or the sand used to make concrete and expand urban areas? Is the ocean a shadow place and a site only suited to traverse or extract from? Or can the ocean be thought of as a place of belonging, as a home?

This chapter follows Plumwood's call "to acknowledge and honour all the places that support you, at all levels of reconceptualization, from spiritual to economic, and to honour not just this more fully-conceived 'own place' but the places of others too" (147-8). Ellen van Neerven's "Water" and Gina Cole's "Melt" move from a 'sense of place' toward a "place-based critique" (Plumwood 140). The notion of 'shadow places' runs through this chapter as a starting point for the discussion of place and displacement, belonging and unbelonging. Building off entangled histories of empire and capitalist commodification practices, van Neerven's and Cole's stories dive into a thick description of place that unsettles singular ideas or simplistic interpretations of oceanic materiality.

The three oceanic materials that connect the stories in this chapter are water, sand and phosphate. They appear in different forms in van Neerven's and Cole's stories and are entangled in several colonial ways. Both sand and phosphate have been extensively mined across the world, including in Oceania, up to the present day. Extracted in service of the growth of the global north, these materials are transported across oceans and each comes with its own history of destruction of Indigenous lands, waters and bodies. Water, sand and phosphate can be read as 'shadow materials': integral to the dispossession of Indigenous lands and waters, and the expansion of the colonial nation-state. In "EARTH", Marijn Nieuwenhuis writes:

[S]and is imagined in ways similar to water — as an element that one can sliver *through*, rather than as an obstacle one has to step over or dig under. Like the ocean, [...] the desert cannot be crossed by foot, but requires an infrastructure that striates space. (Nieuwenhuis 27, italics original)

The infrastructure that oceanic spaces require for humans to cross them is integral to Pacific sea-faring cultures but has also been used as an imperial and capitalist structure of extraction.

In the Western imaginary, sand has come to represent many romantic excursions to other times and other places: tropical island beaches, the grains in an hourglass, childhood memories of building sandcastles, wet or dry, powdery or dense. The field of island studies has thoroughly analysed both the idea and the lived reality of the island to counter the way the island, via its sandy beaches, has been romanticised and essentialised in Western thought.²⁴ Rachel Carson, for instance, romanticises sand as "a substance that is beautiful, mysterious, and infinitely variable. Each grain on a beach is the result of processes that go back into the shadowy beginnings of life, or the earth itself" (*The Edge of the Sea* 125). Deleuze and Guattari, on the other hand, write about sand deserts as places that are "smooth spaces of the rhizome type" (382). Their idea of sand is unfixed, difficult to define and in a perpetual process of becoming. There, indeed, is not just one type of sand. It can range from limestone and coral white, to volcanic and basalt dark black. It is created in rivers, streams and the ocean. And like the many blues of the ocean, the many colours of sand reveal its complex nature. Rocks and corals erode over thousands of years or with the help of other species such as the Green

²⁴ See chapter one, "Blue Ocean Theories" for a further discussion of the parallels between island studies and the Blue Humanities, and the ways that the Blue Humanities have taken inspiration from island studies scholarship in its discussion of world waters.

Humphead Parrotfish (*Bolbometopon muricatum*) who grind up coral, rocks or seagrasses that they excrete as sand. As an additive, an aggregate, sand is used to make glass, brick and concrete. Sand has become integral to the construction of the twentieth and twenty-first century cityscapes. After water, it is “the highest volume of raw material used on earth [...] [its] use greatly exceeds natural renewal rates” (Peduzzi 11). Sand mining comes with huge environmental costs. Dug and dredged from river bedding, lakes, beaches and oceans, global urban construction increasingly relies on sand mined from the seas, further away from human eyes. Looking at sand from the perspective of the ocean, parallels appear between the treatments of islands and oceans, sand and water.

Meanjin-based Mununjali Yugambeh author Ellen van Neerven’s story “Water” (2014) is a satire of settler colonial Australia and its failed response to a politics of decolonisation. Set in 2022, in a near-future Australia, van Neerven narrates a speculative world and queer Black futurity that, despite a rise in female leadership and elements of reparations for Aboriginal people, has not been able to shake its imperial tendencies and deeply entrenched connections to the mining industry. The shadow places in this short story of fifty-four pages include shadow histories of pain and denial, knowing that “[s]ettler societies are built on a dual war: a war against Nature and a war against the natives” (Rose, *Reports from a Wild Country* 34). “Water” is a story that moves across the boundaries of linear time and space by reincarnating the ancestors of Country as tentacular ‘sandpeople’ who resist the continued sand mining and exploitation of their lands and waters and reanimate their legacies of resistance against colonial invasion.

Gina Cole is an Aotearoa New Zealand author of Fijian, Scottish and Welsh descent, with intimate ties to the histories she narrates via protagonist Rena in “Melt”. Published as part of her debut collection *Black Ice Matter* (2017), “Melt” frames a queer love story via the displacement of ice sculptor Rena’s family and kin from Banaba to Rabi, in northern Fiji, to New Zealand via the histories of phosphate mining, melting ice and rising temperatures. Like sand, phosphate is unfixed, its imaginary connected to boundless food supplies and the rise of global industrial agriculture. The ‘superphosphate’ fertilizer used in large-scale agriculture is made of the raw phosphate rock material, converted into a “liquid, or aqueous (*aq*), state using sulfuric acid (H_2SO_4), which is then dried into fine pellets for fertilizer and applied to soil” (Teaiwa, *Consuming Ocean Island* 32). In Cole’s story, phosphate and water transformations are connected to the radical changes the characters undergo. “Melt” is a queer story that complicates the connections between friends, lovers, family and cultural identity in a world that feels the consequences of imperial mining histories. Cole’s enquiry into the consequences

of phosphate mining for the benefit of industrial agriculture connects this story to that of van Neerven's. Both draw connections between mining and embodiment via queer, Aboriginal and Indigenous protagonists whose lives not only queer heteronormative human relationships, but also engage with transformative human-ocean relationships.

Ellen van Neerven: Water, Sand and Speculative Short Fiction

I know what you're thinking
how can we save the world?
when we have barely
just survived it
[...]
when we have been dispossessed more than once, more than twice
by killings, disease, poison
mining companies, governments, floods and
White fire

— Ellen van Neerven, “Paper Ships, Many Fires”

Short fiction lends itself well to the swift creation of alternative worlds. In “Water”, a story from their collection *Heat and Light* (2014), Ellen van Neerven creates a world that reveals the tensions underlying the commercial appropriation of Aboriginal culture in a neocolonial and capitalist future Australia. Drawing parallels with the continued mining and exploitation of sand and water, “Water” follows protagonist Kaden as she rekindles her familiar and ancestral connections to Country and joins the fight against continued dispossession. The legacies of the British empire, once so extensive they called it the ‘vast empire on which the sun never sets’, are criticised in this dystopian near-future story that is set in the Quandamooka/Moreton Bay region of eastern Australia. “[H]ow can we save the world? / when we have barely / just survived it” (lines 2-4), van Neerven asks in the poem “Paper Ships, Many Fires” (2020). In “Water”, this question is asked through the lens of Aboriginal queer futurity. What happens when Aboriginal and queer futures that were not meant to survive, do?

“Water” could stand alone as a fifty-four-page novella, but in its relationship with the stories before and after in this collection, it is featured as a long story that is part of a short story cycle, drawing connections across the volume between generations of people and Country. *Heat and*

Light follows a tripartite structure, with sixteen stories across three sections titled “Heat”, “Water” and “Light”. While the middle story is not featured in the title of the collection, it is connected to what comes before and after. “Heat” consists of a series of stories that focus on the past through the eyes of several generations of the Kresinger family. “Light” looks at the present via ten separate stories, tied together by shared themes such as belonging, complicated family connections and identity and sexuality. And, disrupting a linear notion of time, the middle story “Water” shows a potential future. *Heat and Light* asks the reader to reconsider notions of time, generational bonds and intergenerational trauma within and across Aboriginal communities. “Water” plays with genre conventions. Helena Kadmos describes van Neerven’s writing as “diverse in its preoccupation and style [...] [their] text interweaves storytelling, realist, magic realist, gothic and speculative traditions and these multiple layers significantly increase the text’s capacity to represent diversity beyond what might be possible in one form alone” (Kadmos). “Water” combines elements of the gothic, speculative realism and Aboriginal speculative futurism in a story that extrapolates contemporary Australia to a dystopian future in order to critique current Australian politics.

Anthropocene, climate change and speculative fiction have become increasingly popular in contemporary Australian literature, represented for instance in bestselling novels such as Claire Coleman’s *Terra Nullius* (2017), Alexis Wright’s *The Swan Book* (2013), Mireille Juchau’s *The World Without Us* (2015) and Jennifer Mills *Dyschronia* (2018). Indigenous writers and writers of colour are at the forefront of published speculative fiction in Australia, as exemplified in the anthology *After Australia* (Ahmad 2020) that gathers twelve imaginative and speculative stories depicting alternative futures ‘after’ Australia. Palyku speculative fiction writer, illustrator and scholar Ambelin Kwaymullina explains why Indigenous authors choose to write in what in Western genre conventions classifies as speculative or science fiction:

I am often told that it is unusual to be both Indigenous and a speculative fiction writer. But many of the ideas which populate speculative fiction books — notions of time travel, astral projection, speaking the languages of animals or trees — are part of Indigenous cultures. [...] Speculative fiction — whether it involves works that might be traditionally thought of as fantasy, or as science fiction, or as anything in between — contains much else that is familiar to Indigenous peoples of this planet. [...] Indigenous peoples everywhere are familiar with fantasy because we have long been the subjects of it. And we know

science fiction, too. We understand the tales of ships that come from afar and land on alien shores. Indigenous people have lived those narratives, and because of this, stories of colony ships exploring the vastness of space do not fill me with a sense of hope or excitement, but with dread. (“Edges, Centres and Futures”)

As Kwaymullina notes, unlike Western speculative and science fiction, Indigenous and Aboriginal authors tend to write stories that stray from the colonial trope of invasion of other lands and worlds. Van Neerven’s speculative world in “Water” reflects this critique of the birth of the settler nation state and offers a satire of Australian governance that becomes undone by Aboriginal resistance. Writing like van Neerven’s reimagines dystopian climate change realities in ways that depart from a normative focus on white or settler perspectives.

Van Neerven is part of a recent influx of young, talented Aboriginal authors who question the status quo and continued marginalisation of their voices and those of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities. Other authors include Alison Whittaker, Maddee Clark, Evelyn Araluen and Oscar Monaghan who are following in the footsteps of more established authors such as Claire Coleman, Bruce Pascoe, Melissa Lucashenko, Alexis Wright and Ambelin Kwaymullina. Van Neerven’s *Heat and Light* won the 2013 David Unaipon award for unpublished manuscripts and the NSW Premier’s Literary Award and was nominated for the Stella Prize, the biggest annual literary award for writing by Australian women and non-binary authors. Since *Heat and Light*, they have published two collections of poetry, *Comfort Food* (2016) and *Throat* (2020) and authored poems for *The Saturday Paper* with Omar Sakr and Maxine Beneba-Clarke, and they co-host a podcast called *Extraordinary Voice for Extraordinary Times* with Omar Sakr.

Queer, Black Futures in “Australia2”

In *Queer Times, Black Futures* (2019), Kara Keeling opens the preface with a line from Audre Lorde’s poem “A Litany for Survival”: “We were never meant to survive” (Lorde, line 24). Keeling adds: “we become or we are unbecoming. We change. We are no longer who we were or who we would have been” (Keeling ix). Working from the premise that “*another world is possible*” (ix, italics original) and, indeed, here now, *Queer Times* reworks the influences of Afrofuturism and Black and queer thought for the current moment. What happens when Black and queer futures that were never meant to survive, do? How have these futures always already shaped the present, and how will they continue to do so?

Keeling turns to the work of Black queer, feminist and Afrofuturist writers and philosophers like Audre Lorde, Franz Fanon and Édouard Glissant to show that in their writing, poetics, rhythms and refrains, and other ways of being are already at work. She calls attention to the “quotidian violence that secures the existing organization of things” (17). This violence systematically held a temporal and spatial logic in place, securing a dominant world order that subordinates Black, Indigenous, and queer perspectives while at the same time disavowing “its founding genocidal wars” (16). The closing lines of Lorde’s “A Litany for Survival” implore the reader to speak out, despite the difficulty to overcome the oppression of the voices of those that were never meant to be heard: “but when we are silent / we are still afraid / So it is better to speak / remembering / we were never meant to survive” (Lorde, lines 40-44).

It is in relation to similarly oppressive conditions and histories that Neerven’s “Water” echoes the idea that in queer Black futures another world is not only possible, but already here. Van Neerven creates a speculative and satirical near-future Australia. This Australia in 2022 is a Republic led by a President called Tanya Sparkle. President Sparkle has big plans. She is on the brink of creating a so-called ‘Australia2’:

A new country is being built, by using the islands of Moreton Bay. [...] The re-forming company are going to create new land between the twenty or so islands off the Brisbane coastline, joining them to create a super island. This is where Aboriginal people can apply to live. (van Neerven 73-4)

The story builds a world that also tries to build a world. In many ways, this future Australia is an extension of the present, a critique and a satire of contemporary Australian political issues. There is a need for and surge in female leadership, with plans for reconciliation and reparations for Aboriginal people. Yet, in “Water” these seemingly progressive social interventions unravel and unfold to reveal another dystopian world only thinly veiled by utopian-sounding and tokenistic political propaganda. Rather than a vision for Australia that finally atones for its centuries of wrongdoing, President Sparkle’s plans are an attempt to extend the exploitation and disempowerment of Aboriginal people. Aboriginal culture is celebrated in the world of “Water” only for capital gain and to promote an image of equality.

Ideas of reparations and sovereignty are used in “Water” to further segregate Aboriginal people. Ironically, Aboriginal people without connections to Country become doubly

dispossessed and literally moved to the margins, to Australia2.²⁵ Satire is used in “Water” as a literary device that extrapolates some of the tendencies of the neoliberal Australian political environment, eager to commodify Aboriginal heritage and culture into a capitalist logic:

Just after we became a republic, the Australian anthem was changed to the 2012 Jess Mauboy hit, ‘Gotcha’. The national flag is a horrible mash-up job of the old flag and both the Aboriginal flag and the Torres Strait Islander flag. It looks like Tanya Sparkle’s seven-year-old son did it in Paint.

Aboriginal art has almost wiped out all other Australian art. A journo said recently in *The Australian*, ‘If you’re not black, forget it.’ The sad thing is, most Aboriginal artists crack under the enormous pressure and celebrity, from the commodification of their work. You only have to look at my family for examples of that. (73, italics original)

While later in the story “Water” includes elements that are more distinctly speculative, a lot of the world-building at the start of the story stays close to contemporary Australian reality. The appropriation of Aboriginal culture foreshadows a licencing dispute concerning the Aboriginal flag that caused uproar in June 2019. Luritja artist Harold Thomas, who designed the flag in 1971 and was recognised as author and copyright owner of the flag in 1997, sold worldwide licensing to WAM Clothing. WAM Clothing is a non-Indigenous operated clothing company, who soon began to send cease-and-desist letters and invoices for use of the design to competing businesses but also to activist and non-profit organisations such as the Indigenous Wellbeing Centre in Bundaberg that gave out T-shirts with the flag to patients who had come to the clinic for a preventative health check. Written at least five years prior to the start of this licencing dispute, “Water” signals existing commodification of Aboriginal art and culture and extends it to the fictional world of President Sparkle’s reimagined Australia/Australia2.

Framed as a dystopia, at its core “Water” is a story of generative potential. It is also a reminder that alternatives to problems generated by a mining and terraforming Australian government are present in the other worlds that are already here. Protagonist and narrator

²⁵ This is eerily reminiscent of Australia’s oceanic border politics and the way in which late twentieth century ideas around ‘border security’ and migration gave way to ‘off-shore detention facilities’ — concentrations camps on several Pacific islands — which built on the longer history of the White Australia Policy. The literal removal of refugees and migrants is further analysed in chapter six, “The Waves, the Ocean”, in relation to Behrouz Boochani’s *No Friend but the Mountains* (2017).

Kaden is a young Aboriginal woman who has lost contact with her family after the death of her father. She takes a job as ‘Cultural Liaison Officer’ for the terraforming industry that intends to clear the islands of its current population so they can start the creation of Australia2. Kaden takes the job with the idea that she will be able to reconnect with her heritage and find a sense of self, while working with the Aboriginal communities on the islands and convincing them to move and make way for the super island. However, she quickly finds out she will be working with ‘sandpeople’. These creatures are said “to have formed when they started experimenting here, mining the sea in preparation for the islandising” (76) and present a problem for the continuation of the Australia2 project. The sandpeople, also called ‘plantpeople’ or more derogatorily ‘sandplants’, are tentacular beings with “green human-like heads” (76) that divide their time between land and water and “root — that is, they firm their roots to an area, into the ground, and are hard to persuade to move; you can’t get them away” (76). On first contact with sandperson Larapinta, Kaden is “struck by how startlingly human-like they are, and how alarmingly unhuman they are. Green like something you would see in a comic strip, but they are real” (78). They are made of both the land and the water they come from, demonstrated in their ability to sprout water from the tips of their fingers and the vegetation that grows on their “wild frond-like hair” (78). Their embodiment of the land, the sand and the waters of the region, is crucial to why the sandpeople cannot and will not leave.

These green, tentacular, water creatures are reminiscent of the Oankali in Afrofuturist writer Octavia E. Butler’s *Xenogenesis* trilogy.²⁶ The Oankali are an alien race with tentacular features who aspire to save the last surviving humans after nuclear wars have made Earth almost entirely uninhabitable. By interbreeding and blending human and Oankali genetics, the Oankali want to save humanity from its tendency to wage war against itself and, inevitably, always cause its own downfall. In part an homage to Butler’s importance for Black queer Afrofuturist writing in the late twentieth century, van Neerven’s queer Aboriginal sandpeople are equally adamant about intervening into the disastrous tendencies of white settlers in a colonised Australia. When Kaden meets the sandpeople, they tell her that they are not intent on leaving the islands. They are resisting the islandising and dispossession of Aboriginal lands for the Australia2 project. Kaden’s journey in “Water” is shaped by her sexual relationship with sandperson Larapinta and her subsequent discovery that the sandpeople are her “old people. They’re spirits of thousands of years” (118) that have risen from the waters to fight the

²⁶ Butler’s *Xenogenesis* series, which includes *Dawn* (1987), *Adulthood Rites* (1988) and *Imago* (1989), was later published together under the title *Lilith’s Brood* (2000).

doubling of dispossession. Like Butler's Oankali, van Neerven entangles the survival of the region's lands and waters with the creation of queer, nonheteronormative and nonhumanist relationships. The water of the Pacific Ocean and the way it connects the islands in this archipelago is central to both Kaden's and the sandpeople's sense of self, embodiment and resistance against the settler colonial state.

Water, Sand and Queer Settler Colonialism

Kaden and Larapinta develop a sexual relationship that increasingly defies binary oppositions between human and nonhuman, nature and culture, sex and gender in ways that are both specific to the political collectivity of queer Aboriginal storytelling and to the broader genre that Anishinaabe scholar Grace Dillon names 'Native Apocalypse'. In the introduction to the influential collection of stories *Walking the Clouds: An Anthology of Indigenous Science Fiction* (2012), which includes stories from Native American, First Nations, Aboriginal and Māori authors, Dillon argues that:

Native Apocalypse is really that state of imbalance [...] a state of extremes, but within those extremes lies a middle ground and the seeds of *bimaadiziwin*, the state of balance, one of difference and provisionality, a condition of resistance and survival. Native apocalyptic storytelling, then, shows the ruptures, the scars and the trauma in its effort ultimately to provide healing and a return to *bimaadiziwin*. This is the path to a sovereignty embedded in self-determination. (9, italics original)

"Water" is an Aboriginal iteration of such Native apocalyptic storytelling. Several of its plot lines serve as counter-narratives to reassert sovereignty, land and water rights, and self-determination against the devastation caused by settler colonialism. This includes environmental degradation, the destruction of Indigenous culture including languages, as well as enforced heterosexuality.

Canadian scholar Scott Morgensen argues that "[g]ender and sexuality are intrinsic to the colonisation of Indigenous peoples and the promulgation of European modernity by settlers" and that "colonialism is produced, extended and illuminated by gendered and sexual power" (3). In *Spaces Between Us: Queer Settler Colonialism and Indigenous Decolonisation* (2011), Morgensen writes that he "understand[s] queer to be a location constituted by white-

supremacist settler colonialism that will be unascertainable until this condition is explained” (51). Morgensen is rightfully critical of queer theory and its roots in white-supremacist settler colonialism. He argues that “what is perceived as ‘queer’” is unimaginable in current discourses, and that “the only possible explanation of queerness under white-supremacist settler-colonialism is one that also interrogates that condition” (52). The narrative of queer sexuality transcends the individual Western nation and grants “non-Native queers a global purview, by projecting them along the twinned global scales of primitive roots and civilizational futures” (226). Western queer globalisms are, therefore, settler colonial projects, and often ignore non-cis and nonheteronormative Indigenous gender and sexual identities, such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Brotherboy and Sistergirl communities.²⁷

Morgensen argues that “Native queer and Two-Spirit people recall languages, memories and relations that exceed colonial epistemic authority” and that their projects “disrupt the temporality of settler colonialism” (52). In “Water”, van Neerven similarly disrupts the typical temporality that places Aboriginal people in the past and queerness in the future, by eclipsing a linear Western interpretation of queerness as futurity. Kaden falls in love with her ancestor Larapinta, creating a transgenerational queer relationship that is set in a future Australia. Kaden describes her sexual identity as “queer”:

We find ourselves talking about gender. We are of two different societies. She asks me if I feel like a woman, even though I have short hair. I tell her that hair is the least of it. She asks me about my Aboriginal identity. I tell her that it is easy to pretend that I am someone else, but I don’t want to pretend.

‘And your sexual identity?’ She is really in the mood for grilling me.

‘Queer, I guess.’ I say. ‘I know it’s an old-fashioned word ...’

‘That’s fine. I do not know the common usage of words. They are bricks, aren’t they?’

‘Some words are loaded,’ I continue. ‘Will always be loaded.’ (van Neerven 95)

²⁷ As Madi Day describes in “Indigenist Origins: Institutionalizing Indigenous Queer and Trans Studies in Australia” (2020): “*queer* and *trans* are different and separate terms in a Western context, such a divide is not always distinct among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Terms like *Sistergirl* and *Brotherboy* are in use broadly to refer to transgender women and men, but they can also be used to refer to people of varying genders and sexualities because of their relational nature” (368, italics original).

In Kaden and Larapinta's conversations about what English words mean and what they do, English as a dominant language is queered alongside settler colonialism's history of gendered and sexual power. Their relationship is not only nonheteronormative; Kaden and Larapinta's transgenerational and transspecies relationship defies other normative boundaries such as those between the human and the nonhuman. As Jessica White notes: "Larapinta, as a plantperson, is her kin" (101), connecting their relationship to the lands and waters they both embody. When Kaden suggests they run away together, she realises they cannot leave:

'Why don't you run away with me?' I say. But I know it's damn near foolish.
Now without me, without her, without us, there is no ancestral country, there is
no Ki, there is no Moreton Bay.

But we have rooted, here, in this room, because anything outside means loss,
and losing one another is like the cutting of history, the shredding of
encyclopaedias. (van Neerven, "Water" 118-9).

Kaden and Larapinta's politics of care connects their bodies to the land and the water. Larapinta visualises her love for Kaden via her embodiment as more-than-human, always already in connection to the land and waters both are made of. She shows Kaden her flowers, and manipulates water with her fingers when Kaden is stung by blue bottle jellyfish:

She does her trick again. I haven't yet been able to believe it. She extracts
saltwater out of my skin with her middle finger and then releases a flow of
freshwater; just the first drop makes it better. The saltiness is out. (87)

Larapinta's water manipulation forms a central part of this resistance narrative. Her name seems inspired the Larapinta river in central Australia,²⁸ which is considered one of the oldest waterways in the world, or the ancestor of Australia's terrestrial waterways. The Larapinta river's water is older than time, and like the character in "Water", consists of freshwater. This watery materiality connects van Neerven's Larapinta to the oldest waters of the continent, and to the current climate change instability of the Larapinta river.

²⁸ Larapinta is the Arrernte name for this river; its colonial name is the Finke River. Larapinta is part of the Kati Thanda-Lake Eyre Basin, whose river flows "are amongst the most variable and unpredictable in the world" (Cockayne). They may have formed a large inland sea during the Cretaceous period and have been greatly affected by climate change and current arid conditions.

When Kaden and Larapinta have sex, Kaden can only think about going through the water: “I feel like all I can hear in my head is a speedboat travelling through water” (119). The sandpeople are the spiritual and physical embodiments of the ancestors of these waters and lands and the story ends with their resistance and uprising:

In the clear water behind the ferry I can see them. They are everywhere. Stretching out as far as my vision reaches. And then I know there are as many behind them. The brown reeds of their hair are all that is showing. They move in formations, in shapes similar to the last letter of the alphabet. Larapinta is one of them. There must be thousands. I step onto the ferry and stand next to my uncle. The water is rising around us and I can feel the force in the leaping waves and what we’re about to do. (122-3)

With “leaping waves” and “the water rising around us” (123) van Neerven connects climate change tropes of rising sea levels and the devastating power of waves to the resurgence of Aboriginal communities, cultures and people. In “Water”, the waters are rising to take back the lands and waters that were stolen. Aboriginal sovereignty drives the character’s use of water as a powerful tool against the colonial nation. What is more, Kaden and Larapinta’s queer, transgenerational and transspecies relationship unsettles the exploitation of Indigenous lands and waters that also happened via the exploitation of Indigenous bodies.

The triangular relationship between Kaden, Larapinta and the water represents a critique of the exploitation of Indigenous lands and waters via the sexual exploitation of Indigenous bodies. Their sexual relationship and independence from Western gender and sexuality conventions stands in defiance of the abuse of Indigenous women throughout colonised parts of the world. Ambelin Kwaymullina writes that colonial violence across the Australian continent and around the world took place in many consecutive and repetitive cycles that “included sustained sexual violence against Indigenous women and children inflicted over the course of generations. As this violence was inscribed upon the bodies of Indigenous peoples so too was it inscribed upon our Countries” (“You are on Indigenous Land” 196). Koenpul scholar Aileen Moreton-Robinson writes: “The body for Aboriginal women is the link to people, country spirits, herstory and the future and is a positive site of value and affirmations as well as a site of resistance” (“When the Object Speaks” 285). In “Bodies that Matter on the Beach” (2015), Moreton-Robinson explains the connections between colonisation of Indigenous lands, encounters that happened on the beach, and the erasure of Indigenous

subjectivity: “In the white colonial imagination, we have become abject subjects; our lives and our bodies were physically erased from the beach” (36). As the site of first contact between Indigenous people and colonisers, the beach, Moreton-Robinson argues, “is appropriated as a white possession through the performative iteration of the white male body” (35). In Australia, as in many other places with colonial histories and presents, beach culture and surfing has been co-opted by white masculinity as an object of “pleasure, leisure, and national pride” (46). However, Moreton-Robinson writes:

The beach is Indigenous land and evokes different memories [...] As a border, the beach is constituted by epistemological, ontological, and axiological violence, whereby the nation’s past and present treatment of Indigenous people becomes invisible and negated through performative acts of possession that ontologically and socially ground white male bodies. (44-46)

In both contemporary Australia and the worlds created in van Neerven’s “Water”, the sand mining industry perpetuates the settler colonial project, the idea of the ‘white possessive’ and the continued harm inflicted on Indigenous bodies and Country. Water and sand have been used against Aboriginal people, but in “Water” are reclaimed to fight against institutional colonial powers. In “Water”, the beach as a space possessed by the white coloniser becomes undone by the sandpeople who lead the resurgence from their coastlines and water edges. As I explain in what follows, “Water” is informed by the history of the Quandamooka nation and the resistance against sand mining and colonial terraforming. These sand mines are shadow places that are slowly, but surely, reclaimed by Aboriginal nations and communities.

In “On the Importance of a Date, or Decolonizing the Anthropocene” (2017), Davis and Todd write that the Anthropocene has always been “*the extension and enactment of colonial logic*” (769, italics original). They assert that the settler colonial project has always included the process of terraforming and shaping the earth according to colonial principles and European ideals. Todd and Davis refer to the work of Eyal Weizman, who in *The Conflict Shoreline* (2015) argues that colonialism’s overarching aim was to transform and ‘re-engineer’ the natural environment, which included the Indigenous people who lived there:

[C]olonial projects from North America through Africa, the Middle East, India and Australia sought to re-engineer the climate. Colonizers did not only seek to overcome unfamiliar and harsh climatic conditions, but rather to transform them.

Native people, who were seen as part of the natural environment, were displaced along with the climate or killed. Although the attempt was to make the desert green, instead the green fell fallow, lakes deadened, and oceans rose. (Weizman 36)

In Australia, British colonisers and first settlers sought to change the landscape to emulate the English countryside they were familiar with. In *Dark Emu. Black Seeds: Agriculture or Accident?* (2014), Tasmanian Aboriginal, Bunurong and Yuin author and historian Bruce Pascoe describes how the first British colonisers imagined Australia: “The first British visitors sailed to Australia contemplating what they were about to find, and innate superiority was the prism through which their world was seen” (2). Pascoe analyses diary entries from early settlers to find that their ideologies of superiority toward the Aboriginal nations and communities, as well as the native Australian environment, led them to ignore existent Aboriginal economies, agriculture and aquaculture. Oblivious to and misinterpreting the “advanced nature of the Aboriginal society and economy” (9), the British proclaimed Australia ‘terra nullius’ or ‘nobody’s land’: “In denying the existence of the economy they were denying the right of the people to their land and fabricating the excuse that is at the heart of Australia’s claim to legitimacy today” (4). These founding settler colonial ideals are reflected in contemporary Australian politics, which still struggles with a lack of adequate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representation in Parliament, as well as a continued commitment to terraforming — in particular, mining and the extraction of other fossil fuels.

“Water” takes place in the Quandamooka State, an area that has long been used as a site and shadow place for sand extraction by large Western multinationals. The Quandamooka State has long had to endure the displacement of its traditional owners. Large areas were mined or sold off for purpose of tourism and agriculture. The area includes larger islands such as Moorgumpin/Moreton Island and Minjerribah/North Stradbroke Island, and many smaller islands such as Canaipa/Russell Island, Karragarra and many of the Southern Quandamooka/Moreton Bay Islands. After a sixteen-year legal battle, the Quandamooka people were granted Native title of part of the Quandamook islands/Northern Moreton Bay Islands in 2017. In a second claim that year, their Native title was extended West to parts of the mainland, the Quandamook Coast, and further coastal lands and waters. When the sandpeople in Neerven’s “Water” lead the way of resistance against the sand mining and terraforming of lands and waters, this is a speculative response to the specific history and

contemporary relationships between the Traditional Owners of the area and the Australian government.

Sand has been mined on the colonised lands of the Quandamooka State since 1949. The sand extracted in this case is the highly prized ‘silica sand’ mined from both beaches and coastlines as well as more inland, through open pits. Silica sand is used, for instance, in glassmaking, golf courses and sports fields, water filtration and in construction materials. High quality silica sand is needed for LED lights, LCD panels, solar panels and vaccine vials. Its materiality is therefore integral to many contemporary consumer products. The mining of sand, however, has devastating impacts on ecological systems and in Australia utterly negates the rights of traditional owners like the Quandamooka people, who have always resisted the mining of their lands. Several fossil fuel and mineral mines remain operational in Australia, or are still proposed and opened, despite Native Title claims.²⁹ After years of activism by the Traditional Owners, Native Title holders, the Quandamooka people and Quandamooka State, the mines on Minjerribah/North Stradbroke Island that are owned by Belgian company Sibelco, closed late 2019.

The tensions between settler colonial Australia, which still heavily relies on the fossil fuel and mineral mining industry, and the growing impact of bushfires, floods, environmental degradation and climate change activism, is reflected in “Water”. Van Neerven’s story invokes decades of Aboriginal activism against the appropriation and misuse of their lands and waters, represented in the ‘sandpeople’ who emerge from the banks and waters of the Quandamooka region. As they rise from their sands and waters to protect their Country, they are leading the way for the rest of their communities and kin. “Water” calls upon a long history of Aboriginal resistance against the intersection of colonialism and extractive economies that exploit Aboriginal lands. Formed from the sands and waters of Ki Island, Kaden and Larapinta show that terraforming not only upsets the marine and coastal life that would make way for the speculative Australia², but also threatens the bodies of the ancestors of this Country with displacement — something that they resist, on the beaches and coastlines that saw their first

²⁹ In August 2018, for instance, lawyers acting for the Wangan and Jagalingou council called on a UN council to protect their human rights against the infamous Adani Carmichael mine on their country in the Galilee Basin in Queensland. This mine, however, is still set to open, despite continued activism from Wangan and Jagalingou people. The Queensland government has extinguished the Native title of over 1385 hectares of Wangan and Jagalingou Country in August 2019, that could lead to the forced removal of Wangan and Jagalingou people from their ancestral lands to make way for the mine.

dispossession. Reclaiming which “bodies [...] matter on the beach” (Moreton-Robinson, “Bodies that Matter” 33) means that the sand and the beach once again become a transitory space. Van Neerven’s near-future Australian government is intent on expanding its occupation of stolen lands, but the closing line of the story — “The water is rising around us and I can feel the force in the leaping waves and what we’re about to do” (123) — indicates that the tides have changed in favour of the relentless resistance of the people whose lands and waters it was, and always will be.

Gina Cole: Melting and Mining Ocean Island

Rena turned to see a trail of melt water leading to Vivienne as she walked along the line of traffic handing ice glasses to frazzled people in their heated cars. She looked at Rangitoto, floating suspended upside down above the horizon in Fata Morgana mirage as if a ship could pass underneath.

— Gina Cole, “Melt”

The adverse relationship between the imperial mining industry, rapidly changing climates and the displacement of Indigenous people frames Gina Cole’s story “Melt”. In this short story, Cole raises questions about the local and global consequences of the phosphate mining industry in Oceania. As in van Neerven’s “Water”, the characters in “Melt” are connected to histories of displacement, and to places that have been colonised and mined to sustain large global capital industries. Unlike Kaden and Larapinta, however, the protagonists of “Melt” are no longer able to directly access their ancestral lands to stage a resurgence. Protagonist Rena is an ice sculptor who carves large frozen tableaux together with childhood friend Vivienne, for whom she has romantic feelings. During a heatwave in Auckland, Aotearoa New Zealand, and stuck on the highway, Rena tries to express her feelings to Vivienne, and her frustration that their relationship might not turn out the way she wanted, while their sculptures melt in the back of the truck. “Melt” is a whirlwind of a story, quickly setting the scene in contemporary Auckland, while untangling the complex family and migration history of protagonist Rena. Cole connects climate change and colonialism-induced migration in the opening paragraphs:

Rena heard the radio announcer say that Auckland had not recorded a temperature this high since 1872: it was a sweltering thirty-two degrees. Such high temperatures are normal in Rabi, Rena’s first home. (175)

The island Rabi is part of Fiji but is inhabited by the displaced population of the island Banaba, that is currently part of Kiribati. Banaba was so heavily mined for phosphates that it became increasingly uninhabitable. In 1945, the Banabans were moved thousands of kilometres across the ocean to Rabi that had been purchased by the British government with the royalty money from the colonial nations that invested in phosphate mining and the destruction of an entire island. For decades, Banaba, along with other colonised places like neighbouring Pacific island Nauru that lies 185 kilometres west of Banaba, and Christmas Island in the Indian Ocean, sustained the growth of global agriculture. Phosphate plays a key role in the rise of large-scale agricultural production of, for instance, grain, beef, lamb and dairy, and phosphate mining took place on Banaba between 1900 and 1980 by “various agents across the British Empire” (Teaiwa, *Consuming Ocean Island* xiv).

In “Melt”, contrasting spaces converge with several materials: settler colonial nation Aotearoa New Zealand meets Fiji and Banaba, queer and heteronormative relationships, phosphate, sea water and melting ice. The ‘shadow places’ that have been used to sustain industrial and global agriculture talk back in Cole’s narrative. They assert themselves to convey the idea that in a world still coming to terms with the impact of its colonial legacies, a sense of belonging is complicated by the disappearance of the “single, small, unified ‘home’ community” (Plumwood 147). The diasporic nature of Cole’s characters’ relationship to place doubles in the dissolution of material belonging via melting ice and stolen phosphates.

The thirteen-page story “Melt” closes a series of thirteen stories in *Black Ice Matter* (2017) that consider alternative interpretations of oppositional pairs such as heat/cold, belonging/unbelonging, local/global and ocean/land. Building on tropes such as disappearing glaciers and icebergs that are often employed in contemporary climate change fiction, Cole’s stories play with the images and ideas of melting ice but shift their usual polar location to places and characters from Oceania. In the story “Till” a Fijian glaciologist goes to study in Hokkaido “clamouring to escape the suffocating coup culture in Fiji” (39). Incorporating the idea of melting ice literally, metaphorically and psychologically, “Melt” shows how the relationship between disappearing ice, colonialism and climate change is connected to the disappearance and emergence of queer and diasporic relationships.

Black Ice Matter is Cole’s first published collection of stories, the result of a master’s degree in Creative Writing at Auckland University that was supervised by poet Selina Tusitala Marsh. Cole is of Fijian, Scottish and Welsh descent, born and raised in Aotearoa New Zealand. Pacific identities are often multifaceted, and Cole’s heritage is reflected in her stories. Several characters in the collection have ties to Fiji: as Indigenous Fijians, Fijians of mixed heritage,

or citizens of other Pacific nations with Fijian heritage. Also called “Kailoma (mixed blood), Part-European and Half-Caste”, the existence of many descriptions of people “who share Fijian and European ancestry”, Kailoma Fijian scholar Lucy de Bruce emphasises, describe “both the inadequacy and artifice of racial labels” (De Bruce 114). De Bruce notes how people of mixed Fijian/European ancestry have historically been “considered ambiguous citizens and nuisances who were not ‘real Fijian’ or ‘real European’” (124). The British colonial management of Fijian identities protected Fijians of Indigenous ancestry to a certain extent. However, this came at the cost of eradicating the narratives of those of mixed ancestry from the national consciousness. As a writer of Kailoma Fijian heritage herself, Cole raises the complicated connections between (post)colonial identities and multiple ancestral origins in “Melt”. With ice as a “metaphor for forces that can sway through people’s lives”, Cole draws parallels between the melting of ice and the process of decolonising contemporary Pacific identities, “the same way a glacier can cut through rock” (“Gina Cole”).

In *Queer Phenomenology* (2006), feminist theorist Sara Ahmed asks: “[w]hat does it mean to be orientated? How do we begin to know or feel where we are, or even where we are going, by lining ourselves up with the features of the grounds we inhabit, the sky that surrounds us, or the imaginary lines that cut through maps? How do we know which way to turn to reach our destination?” (6). Cole’s complex orientation of ethnic, social and familiar Oceanic identities indicates that, as for Ahmed, “[t]he question of orientation becomes [...] a question not only about how we ‘find our way’ but how we come to ‘feel at home’” (Ahmed 7).

Complicating a Politics of Belonging

In Cole’s “Melt” different modes of belonging drive the plot. The entanglement of home and a politics of belonging are exemplified in protagonist Rena’s (short for “Marenanuka Tonganibeia” (175)) relationship to the places that she calls ‘home’. From the first few pages of the story, Rena’s “troubled” (177) heritage can be pieced together:

Her home was now in Howick, but her first home would always remain Rabi and Marenanuka Tonganibeia would always remain Rabian [...] Those who knew the troubled history of Rena’s home would debate whether she was truly Rabian at all. In fact Rena was of Banaban descent; her people came from the raised coral island of Banaba within the Gilbert Island chain, more accurately known as the Republic of Kiribati. (175-177)

Rena's personal history is traced back to several nations affected by transoceanic imperial mining practices, thereby enforcing the idea that 'feeling at home' is inherently entangled with the political structures that co-create these feelings of belonging. Rena's cultural heritage connects Howick/Aotearoa New Zealand to Rabi/Fiji and Banaba/Kiribati. Rena's cultural and social identities reveal the complexity of place and the shadows of colonialism.

Plumwood's essay "Shadow Places and the Politics of Dwelling", discussed earlier, becomes relevant again here. In her influential work in eco- or environmental feminism, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (1993), Plumwood critiqued the separation of Humans from Nature, with a focus on the hierarchical Western logic that posits 'Nature' as female, and lesser than male 'Culture'. In "Shadow Places", she extends these ideas toward an ecojustice perspective to argue that the commodification and domination of nature is a problem of Western capitalist-induced social inequality. Plumwood points out that those most affected by polluted skies and seas intersect with a capitalist power imbalance:

The losers will be (and in many places already are) those, human and non-human, without market power, and environmental issues and issues of justice must increasingly converge. (*Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* 13-14)

Shadow places emphasise the inherent plurality of 'place' or 'homeplace'. Plumwood argues that a narrow interpretation of belonging founded in Western binary thought undermines the fragmentation and malformation of place. Cole's "Melt", while set in contemporary Aotearoa New Zealand, complicates the singularity of place to unravel the colonial and extractive capitalist legacies that have influenced the lives of its central characters. Rena's ethnic origins are connected to Rabi, Fiji, where her parents migrated from, as well as Banaba, which is currently part of the Republic of Kiribati. Rena's defiantly refuses to simplify her heritage. She reflects on the time she entered an ice sculpting competition in Las Vegas and the organisers required her to "state her ethnic origin" (176):

One time for a laugh she had written 'Rabid' on a form that required her to state her ethnic origin. Although why ethnic origin held any importance for a Las Vegas ice sculpture competition remained a mystery to her. [...] The Las Vegas had rejected her entry on the basis that she had entered a non-existent ethnicity. She had tried to point out to the organisers that Rabi was an actual country, a Pacific Island.

‘Those ignorant Las Vegans think I’m joking or something,’ she said to Vivienne.

Vivienne had intervened on her behalf and explained to the organisers that in fact Rena was a New Zealander. (176)

The exclusionary consequences of Rena’s complicated heritage relate to what can be called the ‘politics of belonging’. Theories of the politics of belonging concern themselves with issues of state citizenship and belonging to the national homeland. For instance, John Crowley in “The Politics of Belonging: Some Theoretical Considerations” (1999) defines the politics of belonging as “the dirty work of boundary maintenance” (30) and, more recently, Nira Yuval-Davis in *The Politics of Belonging* (2011) notes that “[i]t is important to differentiate between belonging and the politics of belonging” (10). Marco Antonsich identifies two realms of belonging: “belonging as a personal, intimate, feeling of being ‘at home’ in a place (place-belongingness) and belonging as a discursive resource that constructs, claims, justifies, or resists forms of socio-spatial inclusion/exclusion (politics of belonging)” (645). ‘Place-belongingness’, according to Antonsich, follows similar distinctions made by scholars such as Tovi Fenster (2005) who argues that belonging as a “personal, intimate, private expression of daily practices” (242) — a ‘sense of belonging’ — is different from public-oriented formal structures of ‘membership’ such as citizenship. The politics of belonging is generally concerned with societal structures and the public and political aspects of belonging (Wright 394). It tends to remove connections to place from their materiality, favouring a more abstract analysis of ‘nationhood’ or the ‘state’.

In *Who Sings the Nation-State: Language, Politics, Belonging* (2007), Judith Butler and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak discuss the state, the nation-state and statelessness. “If the state is what ‘binds’”, Butler notes, “it is also clearly what can and does unbind. And if the state binds in the name of the nation, conjuring a certain version of the nation forcibly, if not powerfully, then it also unbinds releases, expels, banishes” (5).³⁰ Butler recalls the binary logic that founded the Western nation-state, and she reinserts its materiality: “it expels precisely through an exercise of power that depends upon barriers and prisons and, so, in the mode of a certain containment” (5). Following from what is commonly argued as the birth of the nation state with the 1648 Peace of Westphalia treaties, Western ideas concerning one’s ‘own place’ or

³⁰ The consequences of statelessness and the violent limits of borders are further analysed in chapter six, “The Waves, the Ocean”, in relation to oceanic borders and the expulsion of asylum seekers in twenty-first century Australia.

‘homeplace’ have historically been closely tied to notions of ownership and responsibility. Belonging to a nation-state comes with certain responsibilities and benefits, as well as with definite restrictions and limitations that are not only conceptually important, but materially significant.

Rena’s rebellion against listing an ‘ethnic origin’ that conforms to national boundaries stems from the fact that Rabi is not recognised as a sovereign nation, an “actual country” (Cole, *Black Ice Matter* 176). Rabi, Fiji, Banaba, Kiribati and Aotearoa New Zealand are part of a connected fabric of transoceanic imperial mining practices, forced migration and assimilation. The island Rabi is part of northern Fiji. Since 1945, it has been home to most of the Indigenous population of Banaba, that is currently part of Kiribati. Rabi’s official status as part of Fiji is complicated by the fact that since the mid-twentieth century most inhabitants have been Banaban, making them citizens of Kiribati, not Fiji. Indigenous Banabans in Rabi were only allowed dual-Kiribati-Fijian citizenship in 2009, more than sixty years after the first Banabans were moved 2575 kilometres south-west, to Rabi.

Banaba is a 6.5 km² teardrop-shaped island in the Pacific Ocean situated west of the Gilbert Island chain that forms the main part of the Republic of Kiribati. Questions about self-determination and self-governance remain of concern to Banabans on Rabi. A detailed history of the “legal consequences of cross-border community relocation” and the citizenship rights of Banabans on both Kiribatian and Fijian territories is traced by Jane McAdam (2005) who, from interviews with Banabans, reports on the intricate connections between feelings and politics of belonging for contemporary Banabans:

formal citizenship does not necessarily equate with personal understandings of identity and belonging. A recurring theme in my interviews with Banabans on Rabi was: “I am Banaban. Because I am in Fiji I am Fijian, but I am Banaban.” Another interviewee explained: “Yes, a Fijian citizen, but we can’t do anything about it. It’s the government’s idea. We can’t do anything”. (McAdam 329)

When Rabi was bought to relocate the Banabans, the Indigenous population of Rabi were moved to the neighbouring island called Taveuni, continuing the movement and displacement of Oceanic people. There are approximately four hundred Banabans and I-Kiribati currently residing on Banaba, who are “there as caretakers while the majority of Banabans live on Rabi in Fiji” (Teaiwa, *Consuming Ocean Island* 27). The Banabans who live on Rabi or other Fijian islands surrounding it have called these islands home for several generations, while maintaining

strong but complex ties to their Banaban cultural and historical heritage. As Teaiwa notes, this has made for “very awkward interactions between Banabans and Fijians, and Rabi is thus a still-contested place with two displaced populations who call it home” (19). Banabans have been caught up in several claims for independence and have seen their political and national citizenship shift from the British Commonwealth, to Japan, Kiribati and Fiji. Meanwhile, the phosphate mined on Banaba went on to live its shadowed life as agricultural fertiliser, providing food security across the globe. The politics of belonging, and the complexities of nationhood for displaced populations, such as the Banabans, reveals that the boundaries of nationhood — its official documentation, passports, physical distance — cannot prevent the affective nature of belonging from informing people’s relationship to the places they are from.

The affective side of belonging, the realm of “emotional (or even ontological) attachment, about feeling ‘at home’” (Yuval-Davis 10), is intricately connected to the idea of the politics of belonging as discussed by Butler and Spivak. In Plumwood’s concept of shadow places, these two realms of belonging explicitly come together, or rather, become inseparable. Loving and caring for one’s ‘own’ or homeplace is entangled with the politics of states and statelessness. She critiques “contemporary place discourse, especially the concept of *heimat* or dwelling in ‘one’s place’ or ‘homeplace’, the places of belonging” (139) to show that loving one’s own place is neither innocent nor disconnected from the places that sustain these feelings. Plumwood’s work sits across both registers of belonging and connects a sense of belonging, of feeling at home, with its politics. In the case of the multiplicity of place for Indigenous Banabans, these registers and connections are informed by their capitalist and colonial history.

What happens to both “place-belongingness” and a “politics of belonging” when the boundaries of the nation state become increasingly slippery and give way to a network of connections that, in the case of the history that Cole story “Melt” highlights, are aligned along colonial pathways? The ‘homeplace’ is also a “site of resistance”, as bell hooks argues in “Homeplace (A Site of Resistance)” (41). hooks’ essay theorises the value of the ‘homeplace’ for Black families living in a colonised world and emphasises that the home is the place where resistance is able to take place in an otherwise hostile world. In this sense, belonging as an intimate emotion of ‘feeling at home’ becomes inseparable from the collective importance of resistance against oppressive structures and power imbalances. As hooks emphasises, home is not a place devoid or outside of politics. Many revolutions have started at the kitchen table. These connections inform the history and present lives of the people of Banaba. The materiality of this colonial history and, in particular, the mining of phosphate — a shadow material — inform the diasporic nature of Cole’s “Melt” and protagonist Rena’s search for stability. As

Banaban, I-Kiribati and African American scholar Katerina Teaiwa argues: “Banaba is no longer a place, an island in the middle of an ocean, but rather a flow of rocks with multiple trajectories and itineraries” (*Consuming Ocean Island* 11). The history and colonial afterlives of phosphate mining on Banaba exemplify the complexity of shadow places. An island made of phosphate, Banaba has been extended across the world, connecting islands and seas, fertilising our crops and feeding the world.

Phosphate Rock and Diasporic Seas of Islands

In “Melt”, the unnamed narrator describes the displacement of most Banaban people in 1945 as a story of mythological proportions:

In unguarded moments, so the Banaban story goes, the English were heard to whisper among themselves that they had used phosphate royalties from Banaba to purchase Rabi in order to resettle (that is to say, get rid of) the inconvenient Banabans so they could strip-mine Banaba of its remaining precious phosphate, in a carelessly circular process. (176-177)

The narrator in “Melt” points out the hypocrisy of overlooking the places that have bolstered the empire’s economic growth: “Of course, nobody in England remembers or even cares one jot about any of it, as you would expect” (178). These histories of inclusion, exclusion and belonging across the forgotten shadows of the Pacific, coincide with the rise of late twentieth century globalisation and the fertilisation of the world’s pastures.

Katerina Teaiwa’s *Consuming Ocean Island: Stories of People and Phosphate from Banaba* (2015) confirms the ‘English whispers’ described in “Melt”. The displacement of the Banabans to Rabi is connected to the displacement of the materiality of the island itself, what Teaiwa calls “a fragmented and transnational biography of the phosphate rock” (11). Teaiwa’s *Consuming Ocean Island* is an insightful account of the connections between phosphate mining, the imperial and colonial exploitation of Banaba’s Indigenous peoples and the destruction of the island itself. As Teaiwa notes: “The name *Ba-n-aba* means ‘rock land’ and, simultaneously, something both fixed and fluid, material and human. Banaba is the body of the land and the bodies of the people” (xvi, italics original). The growing use of Oceanic phosphates has changed the physical island structure of Banaba, the lives of the people who lived there at the start of the twentieth century and those of their descendants, as well as the bodies of most

people in the world. Phosphate is connected to global food security and Teaiwa calls it “the little rock that feeds” (3). The use of Banaban phosphates fed a global population and thereby assisted the rise of global CO₂ emissions and the climate change effects that are part of further dispossession in Oceanic regions. Imperial mining legacies follow the mined islands Banaba, Nauru and Christmas Island to the present day. Their colonial biopolitical history surfaces in the contemporary exploitation of Nauru and Christmas Island as outposts to hold refugees in Australian-run off-shore processing centres or as quarantine islands to protect settler colonial Australia from the emergence of SARS-CoV-2. These islands fuelled the capital expansion and globalisation of the West and are now used to reenforce colonial boundaries.

Teaiwa writes: “[T]o track Banaban phosphate we would have to recover infinitesimal bits of phosphate and phosphorus from many a field, river, stream, and cereal bowl—and the bones and guts of birds, sheep, and children alike. [...] What is deterritorialized here is the territory itself” (39-40). Both Banaba and Rabi are shadow places, with phosphate functioning as a shadow material, caught up in a colonial web of displacement for the sake of large-scale agriculture and global capital wealth. The many lives of phosphate are connected to the ocean. Phosphate trajectories that started on islands like Banaba moved across the world, creating a sea of phosphates. In this sense, phosphate doubles Oceania and its vast and interconnected relationality — what Epeli Hau‘ofa calls “a sea of islands” (31), where size is relative and small islands become part of vast constellations.

Rena in “Melt” embodies the inherent fluidity of belonging in Oceania, as well as some of its limits. Teaiwa writes that “[m]any Banabans have always seen themselves as being ‘in exile’, and this description of their situation has been used prevalently in both media coverage and travel writing” (184). Yet Banabans were not displaced in the ways that have commonly been theorised in diasporic theory. Unlike most diasporic peoples, whose displacement is connected to a ‘home’ culture that continues to exist, the Banabans that live on Banaba are considered ‘caretakers’ from Rabi rather than at ‘home’ on the island. Teaiwa notes:

[a]t one level Banabans consider Rabi to be Banaban land because it was bought with phosphate money—money from Banaban land. But throughout the decade in which people approached the United Nations, the British government, and the Gilbert and Ellice Island colony for Banaban independence, they never once approached Fiji for Rabi independence. Rabi, after all, was originally indigenous Fijian land. (185)

Cole affirms and extends this perspective via protagonist Rena. Describing herself as “Rabian” (Cole 177), from “Rabi, Rena’s first home” (175), Rena nevertheless positions herself as part of the “displacement tradition” (178). Rena’s parents became part of a Pacific diaspora of labour migration to Western centres in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand as they “travelled to New Zealand, looking for opportunity, settling in Howick” (178-179).

Following scholarly interventions by, among others, Edward Said, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Stuart Hall, James Clifford, Homi Bhabha and Paul Gilroy, postcolonial theory and theories of the diaspora developed ways to imagine ‘culture’ beyond the constraints of the nation state. James Clifford’s “Indigenous Articulations” (2001) draws out the tensions between postcolonial diasporic theory and a “specifically indigenous dialectic of dwelling and travelling” (476-477). In response to Hau‘ofa’s ‘sea of islands’ as well as twenty-first century theories of diasporism, Clifford asks: “[s]hould we think of a continuum of indigenous and diasporic situations? Or are there specifically indigenous kinds of diasporism?” (469). He argues we need to keep the “tensions [...] along the continuum of indigenous locations” in mind — between rural, urban, local and global locations, between ‘home’ and ‘away’ — when we consider the shifting binary dynamics between what is ‘edge’ and what is ‘centre’. Colonialism was “a radically diasporic movement, involving the temporary or permanent dispersion and settlements of millions of Europeans over the entire world” (Ashcroft et al., *Post-Colonial Studies* 61) along with the diasporic movements of slavery in the Americas, “India and Mauritius, while some enslaving of Melanesian and Polynesia peoples also occurred in parts of the South Pacific to serve the sugar-cane industry in places like Queensland, where it was known colloquially as ‘blackbirding’” (61). Enforced displacement through imperial slave economies increased the colonial demand for cheap labour throughout the nineteenth and twentieth century up to the present day. This can be seen in for instance Australia’s ‘Pacific Labour Scheme’ that offers short-term visas for low, semi-skilled and often underpaid seasonal work in rural and regional Australia to Pacific Islanders.

To say then, that the Banaban people are either diasporic or that they are not falls short of the complexity of their movements, and turns the effects of colonial displacement into a question of categorisation that is not necessarily helpful considering a concept like ‘diaspora’ is already an umbrella term for a wide variety of particular historical and sociocultural circumstances. The Banaban people have made Rabi ‘home’, even though their collective resettlement was involuntary, and involved the removal of the community as a whole. Still, their settlement on Rabi was not devoid of autonomy: “[t]here is enough of a sense of autonomy on Rabi for them to ‘test out’ possible ways of organising the community as a whole and in its

various parts” (Teaiwa 206). Fiji is relatively close to Kiribati, compared to the distance of other diasporic peoples, such as Indian people in the United Kingdom or Lebanese communities in Australia, from their ‘home communities’. Banaban/Rabian people are also part of the Pacific labour migration to centres of the global north and settler nations such as Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand. Clarifying these tensions between Oceanic mobility and diasporic movements, Clifford summarises Indigenous Pacific connection to land and place, and simultaneous Oceanic dwelling and travelling as follows:

The contrast between colonial fixity and postcolonial mobility, between indigenous roots and diasporic routes, can’t be allowed to harden into an opposition or a before-after scenario in which cosmopolitan equals modern. [...] [T]his sort of categorization breaks down. We are left with a spectrum of attachments to land and place — articulated, old and new traditions of indigenous dwelling and traveling. (477)

In “Melt”, the changing nature of diasporic Banaban/Rabian belonging and the global movement of phosphates are represented via the mutability of ice and water. The adverse effects of warming climates in the Oceanic region are foregrounded in the setting of “Melt”, and described as ‘alien’ or ‘a mirage’:

Rena looked from the back seat of the factory truck towards Rangitoto Island glittering on the horizon. The giant volcanic cone sat hovering on a mirage layer of quivering blue as though skimming along the surface of the ocean. It looked like an alien space craft about to take off. (175)

As the story progresses, Rena’s search to find a solid or fixed description for her ethnic and social identity is undermined by the complication and potential dissolution of her relationship with Vivienne and the melting of their collaborations. Their ice bar and glasses are melting in the back of the truck. They will not make it to the city centre of Auckland to deliver their sculptures, and Rena decides to hand out the ice to the other people stuck on a sweltering highway: “She handed ice glasses to the children in the back seat, who squealed in surprise when they took hold of the cold objects” (186). Auckland, experiencing its hottest day on record, shows how climate change, colonialism and shadow materials intersect, and traverse via water, phosphates, islands, and people.

The migration of Banaban/Rabian people is expected to grow as changing climates, rising sea levels and the environmental deterioration of many low-lying islands in the Pacific are expected to increase.³¹ The Republic of Kiribati is one of the island groups particularly affected by rising sea levels, as is a large part of Fiji. On the relationship between islands, climate change and global narratives around environmental transformation Elizabeth DeLoughrey notes that “[t]he island has often functioned as a metonymy for our fragile planet” (DeLoughrey, “Introduction” 2). Visions of islands, once seen as isolated and useable as resource for colonial economies, have become synonymous with contemporary ecological degradation. Island nations like Fiji and Kiribati embody this paradoxical presence in relation to climate change action. They are at once ambassadors for the already present impact of climate change on their communities, lands and waters, and yet consistently marginalised within the power play of international relations and global climate change and fossil fuel politics. Ironically, as Teaiwa points out: “if the islands of Kiribati sink below the sea, as predicted by climate change scientists, the mined landscape of Banaba may be the only one left above water” (*Consuming Ocean Island* xvii).

The dissolution of linear material connections in “Melt” upends normative relations to place and identity. Rena’s inherited instability connects her to her family’s displacement and emerges via her resistance to be categorised in Western and binary ways. Rena’s social appearance defies categorisation and shows the subjective nature of Western social identity distinction: “[m]ost people could not make out her racial or gender identity, and would construct it for her according to their own reality” (177). As Rena moves through worlds — queer, straight, Fijian, Banaban, Rabian, New Zealander — the worlds around her are shifting. In a world that is warmer than it has been in a long time, the disappearance of ice marks a shift in Oceanic belonging that is increasingly defined by climate change. The familiar world evoked in “Melt” and Rena’s work in the ice industry with other descendants of migrants from Pacific Islands reinforces the idea that the stereotypes surrounding these places as essentially ‘other’ no longer hold. By calling to the front the shadow places and shadow materials that upend the exclusionary logic of contemporary climate change realities, Cole shows that Pacific Islands and their people are inherently entangled with melting ice masses and climate change realities — in the case of Banaba, through their implication in fossil fuel extraction histories. “Melt”

³¹ This chapter that follows, “A Pacific Anthropocene Poetics: Writing the Tide Against Militarisation in the Poetry of Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner and Craig Santos Perez” further connects oceans and islands, and expands on the oceanic connections via the work of island poets Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner and Craig Santos Perez.

addresses the persistent instability of Oceanic materiality and its connection to the colonial exploitation of islands and the consequences for contemporary Pacific Islander communities.

Conclusion

the whole reason for banaban displacement is colonial agriculture. i like to say ‘agriculture is not in our blood, but our blood is in agriculture.’ ... banabans equated blood and land and ... kinship was constructed not simply on blood or biological reasons, but on the exchange of land which signified adoption. [...] it follows then that in losing their land, they lost their blood. in losing their phosphate to agriculture, they have spilled their blood in different lands.

— Teresia Teaiwa in Katerina Teaiwa *Consuming Ocean Island*³²

The short stories “Water” and “Melt” underscore how the politics of belonging and the notion of home intersect with colonial imperial mining practices and climate change realities in the Quandamooka State, Australia, Banaba, Rabi, and Aotearoa New Zealand. Where van Neerven’s story displays a forceful resurgence of Aboriginal sovereignty, Cole’s story exemplifies the complexities of belonging to a place that lies beyond immediate reach. The shadow places and shadow materials used by colonial extractivist mining to grow the cities and crops of twentieth century Western-dominated globalisation reassert themselves through the watery materiality of Oceania. Rising up from the water or dissolving in the heat, the slippery and wet materiality of the Oceanic islands and their people is foregrounded in these stories. Together, the stories reimagine the terraforming legacies of the British empire from two distinct perspectives.

“Water” and “Melt” foreground Aboriginal, Indigenous, and queer characters whose stories stretch singular interpretations of belonging and home toward more complex, political, activist and diasporic ideas of place in colonised and settler colonial worlds. Building on climate change tropes of disappearing ice and rising sea levels, van Neerven and Cole show that the histories of destruction and displacement do not end when the mining stops. As Katerina Teaiwa writes: “Gil Tabucacon, in anticipation of further displacement in the Pacific in response to climate change, described the Banaban relocation to Fiji as a success story and

³² As cited in Teaiwa, Katerina Martina. *Consuming Ocean Island: Stories of People and Phosphate from Banaba*. Indiana University Press, 2015, pp. 155-158. Quote is originally from Teresia Teaiwa’s “Yagona/Yagogu: Roots and Routes of a Displaced Native.” *UTS Review: Cultural Studies and New Writing*, vol. 4, no. 1, 1998, p. 100. T. Teaiwa writes this essay purposefully entirely in lowercase.

one of social resilience”; however, she notes, “culturally, socially, and politically [...] things are not fully settled for the Banabans in Fiji” (195). In the following chapter, “A Pacific Anthropocene Poetics”, I discuss written, performed and filmed poetry by Marshallese poet Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner and Chamoru poet Craig Santos Perez. Their work shows that simply accepting the (future) loss of the home place and displacement of the human population tends to reiterate the same colonial movements that dislocated the Banaban people from their lands and waters in the mid-twentieth century. Using their words and voices to fight against future impacts of climate change, island loss and continued imperial military influence, Jetñil-Kijiner and Perez reinforce a sense of Oceanic belonging with the maternal and the bodies born from and of their islands.

4. A Pacific Anthropocene Poetics: Writing the Tide Against Militarisation in the Poetry of Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner and Craig Santos Perez

In “The Meridian” speech in 1960, as he accepts the Georg Büchner Prize for his work, the Romanian-German poet Paul Celan attempts to define poetry: “[p]oetry is perhaps this: an *Atemwende*, a turning of our breath” (Celan 47, italics original). Although Celan’s speech, drawn from a post-Holocaust context, may seem distant from the subject of this chapter, his definition of poetry offers a useful way to understand the transformative power of the poetics of the Pacific in the Anthropocene.

Breath and breathing animates Celan’s poetry from beginning to end. The word ‘Atemwende’ or ‘breathturn’ is not only crucial to this speech but is also featured as the title of one of his collections of poetry. In “The Meridian”, one of Celan’s longest pieces of writing, the turning of breath defines the work that poetry does, as well as what poetry is and must be, after the Holocaust. Celan’s work inspired other post-Holocaust artists and thinkers, such as German artist Anselm Kiefer and Algerian-French philosopher Jacques Derrida, who wrote several essays and seminars on Celan’s work. In “Majesties”, Derrida addresses the notion of breath in poetry and thought that Celan proposes:

The difference between the two [poetry and thought] would be, perhaps, almost nothing, barely the time or the turning of a breath, the difference of a breath, a turning of a breath that is barely perceptible. [...] But we are never sure of this. Both the poem, if there is one, and thinking, if there is any, are there because of this im-probability of breath. But breath remains, in some living things, at least, not only the first but also the last sign of life, of living life. The first and last sign of living life. Without breath there would be neither speech nor speaking, but before speech and in speech, at the beginning of speech, there is breath. (Derrida, “Majesties” 109-110)

The materiality of breath and its importance for the existence of speech and life itself are intimately connected to Celan’s work. The connections between silence and speech, between the importance and im-probability of speech are central to both Celan’s and Derrida’s notion

of self and other. Poetry is the vehicle through which speech and thought hold their ground: “the poem holds its ground on its own margin. In order to endure, it constantly calls and pulls itself back from an ‘already-no-more’ into a ‘still-here’” (Celan 49). As Veronique M. Fotti notes, there is a history of the “threatened silencing of poetry in the German language by the atrocities of the century” (80). Following from Celan and Derrida, how does this ‘still-here’ translate to the Pacific region, which saw its own pre- and post-1945 atrocities? As the poetic work at the heart of this chapter shows, when the Second World War ended, colonisation continued in Oceania and expanded its impact on people and their environments. The post-1945 nuclear testing and the weaponisation of Oceanic space coincides with what some consider the start of the Anthropocene.³³ Scientific bodies, such as the Anthropocene Working Group of the International Union of Geological Sciences, have argued for a start of the Anthropocene in 1945, when the first nuclear bomb, the *Trinity*, was detonated in New Mexico in the United States. As in the United States, nuclear testing elsewhere has often taken place on Indigenous lands and waters. How does the continued colonisation and militarisation of the Pacific region incite a poetics of resistance that, like Celan’s, holds its ground and takes us on “the paths on which language becomes voice” (53)?

This chapter examines how the breath of the Pacific is turning in the work of two of the most important contemporary Pacific poets: Marshallese poet Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner and Chamoru poet Craig Santos Perez. Both Jetñil-Kijiner’s and Perez’s work is emblematic of current trends that are commonly categorised as ecopoetry or climate poetry. A heightened sense of environmental engagement lies at the core of their work, one that is acutely political. They express themselves through poetic form, most strikingly longform and performance poetry. In their work, the blanks on the page, the lengths of the pauses and the shapes of sounds turn toward Oceania as a site for continued change and poetic revolution. The waters of the Pacific Ocean and their specific histories, presents and futures inspire Jetñil-Kijiner’s and Perez’s poetic resistance. Voicing defiance against the victimisation of Pacific Islanders via climate change narratives in “‘There’s a Journalist Here’”, Jetñil-Kijiner writes of a ‘finding of breath’, “filling and expanding your lungs” (line 45):

they want to hear

³³ See chapter one, “Blue Ocean Theories”, for a closer analysis of the dating of the Anthropocene and different scholarly interpretations of the Anthropocene’s universalisation of ‘the human’ and alternative ideas that address the impact of colonialism on earthly futures.

about your house
older than you
[...]
how it collapsed
like a lung
as the water rushed in
[...]
they don't want to hear that
weeks later
you found your breath
filling and expanding your lungs
that all you want now
is to move
forward ("There's a Journalist Here", 3-5, 8-10, 42-48)

Significant in the work of Jetñil-Kijiner and Santos Perez is their reinterrogation of fluidity, the figure of the mother and the idea that 'water is life'. This chapter starts with the analysis of how in Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner's *Iep Jāltok: Poems from a Marshallese Daughter* (2017) the feminine, the maternal and the figure of the mother are invoked as a call to action. In order to put a stop to rapid sea-level rise that is increasing the already devastating consequences of nuclear testing threatening the Marshall Islands and the wider Pacific region, Jetñil-Kijiner's poems call upon the monstrous maternal and mother ocean. The rise of ocean waters, radiation and the feminine are significant to poems such as "Tell Them" and "Dear Matafele Peinam" that are "drawing the line" (Jetñil-Kijiner, "Dear Matafele Peinam" 47) against extractive capitalism, global inertia and climate change denial by foregrounding maternal connections to water. The second part of this chapter reads the work of Perez, who in his *from unincorporated territory* series untangles the intersections of continued U.S. militarisation of his home island Guåhan (Guam) and the exploitation of the island's natural resources.

Through these analyses of specific poems, I argue that thinking about fluidity and the generative potential of water has gained renewed importance in the shifting climates of the Anthropocene. Simple stereotypes that equate rising seas and extreme weather with destruction are upturned particularly in the Pacific region, where water has always held a more complex significance that include the birth of island life through transoceanic voyaging and migration. The contemporary poetry explored in this chapter performs a Pacific Anthropocene Poetics: an

oceanic poetic composition that subverts Western neoliberal views of the ocean as empty and remote.

Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner: Writing the Tide Post-Nuclear Testing

Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner is best known today as the climate poet and eco-activist who received a standing ovation for her performance at the opening of the United Nations Climate Summit in New York on 23 September 2014.³⁴ She was selected for this performance from over five hundred candidates to “represent the voice of civil society”, and her voice was loud. “The price of inaction is so high”, she said to a hundred Heads of State, alongside government ministers and leaders from international organisations, business, finance, civil society and local communities. Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner is Marshallese, born in the Marshall Islands, raised in Hawai'i and currently pursuing a PhD at the Australian National University. In her speech to the UN, she calls upon Marshallese and Oceanic pasts, presents and futures to incite the world to act.

The poem she performed after the speech was new. “Dear Matafele Peinam”, named after her infant daughter, was written for the UN Climate Summit before it featured in her first poetry collection, *Iep Jāltok: Poems from a Marshallese Daughter* (2017). Written to her daughter, it poses that the maternal line and female kinship are not at risk but are what will save the world. In both this poem and the entirety of *Iep Jāltok*, Jetñil-Kijiner connects the maternal and the fluid to the genealogy and future of the Pacific. The power of mother ocean and the power of Jetñil-Kijiner's own motherhood converge when, at the end of her performance, amid an ocean of applause, her daughter and partner join her on stage.

The speaker in “Dear Matafele Peinam” is Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner herself. She addresses her daughter Matafele Peinam in exactly one hundred lines of free verse. While the poem was published in print in *Iep Jāltok*, Jetñil-Kijiner is a performance artist who, in addition to her performance at the UN Climate Summit, has distributed several poems on streaming websites

³⁴ Since her performance for the UN in 2014, the writing and performances of Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner have gained an increasing following in the study of Anglophone world literatures and Pacific literary studies and ecocriticism. Prominent research that refers to and analyses Jetñil-Kijiner's work include several articles by Michelle Keown such as “Waves of Destruction: Nuclear Imperialism and Anti-Nuclear Protest in the Indigenous Literatures of the Pacific” (2019), “Children of Israel: US Military Imperialism and Marshallese Migration in the Poetry of Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner” (2018), and “‘Giving Birth to Nightmares’: The Marshallese Nuclear Legacy and Women's Health in Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner's ‘Monster’” (2019), and analysis as the Jetñil-Kijiner's poem “Tell Them” frames the opening of Elizabeth DeLoughrey's monograph *Allegories of the Anthropocene* (2019) and returns in the chapter “An Island is a World”.

such as YouTube and Vimeo under her own name or with collectives such as the *Pacific Storytellers Cooperatives* and the *International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN)*. These video poems are professionally produced and show Jetñil-Kijiner's voice and text, often accompanied by images of oceans, waves crashing into the shoreline, Pacific storms and the already-present impacts of rising sea levels and extreme weather in the Pacific region. In the case of "Dear Matafele Peinam", the video features images and short clips of global climate activism and children from all over the world, including baby Matafele Peinam, in bed, laughing. The soundtrack amplifies Jetñil-Kijiner's voice with the sounds of rushing water, of storms, protests, and the laughs and cries of a baby. When Jetñil-Kijiner performed the poem at the UN, the video that she published to YouTube later that day played in the background.³⁵ Jetñil-Kijiner's work addresses an audience well beyond that of the UN delegates present at the 2014 Climate Summit or the readers of her published poetry collection. Collectively, the video of her performance at the UN and the video poem of "Dear Matafele Peinam" have, almost seven years later, over half a million views on Jetñil-Kijiner's personal YouTube channel alone.

Jetñil-Kijiner's video poetry and performance on the UN stage employ poetic devices and rhetorical strategies of spoken word and slam poetry to convey a strong message. Her words roll off the tongue, like waves crashing into the shoreline, or as she writes in the poem "Two Degrees": "Maybe I'm / writing the tide towards / an equilibrium / willing the world / to find its balance" ("Two Degrees" lines 93-97). The oceanic metaphor of 'writing the tide' is connected to the entanglement of fluidity and the maternal. This fluid entanglement, I argue in this chapter, is not soft or biologically essentialist. It is equally dangerous and all-consuming and produces a radically different outlook on Pacific Islander survival that centres Islander perspectives.

In "Dear Matafele Peinam", speaker Kathy takes a firm stand: "we are drawing the line / here / Because baby we are going to fight / [...] we won't let you drown / you'll see" (47-9, 99-100). Her poetic voice strengthens the claim that it is not enough for the West to complacently accept the loss of Pacific Islands as inevitable, "we deserve / to do more / than just / survive / we deserve / to thrive" (88-93). Apologising to the Island communities already displaced — "to the Carteret Islanders of Papua New Guinea / and to the Taro Islanders of the Solomon Islands / I take this moment / to apologize to you / we are drawing the line / here"

³⁵ See Jetñil-Kijiner, Kathy. "UN Climate Summit Poem 'Dear Matafele Peinam'." *YouTube*, uploaded by Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner, 24 Sept. 2014, www.youtube.com/watch?v=DJuRjy9k7GA.

(43-48) — Kathy calls for an end to climate colonialist cycles of displacement. “Dear Matafele Peinam” makes use of repetition, alliteration and assonance to strengthen this message. The repetition of ‘oo/ou’ sounds join the addressee of the poem, “you”, baby Matafele, to the “lucid [...] lagoon” and “roots” that connect the body of baby and mother to the body of lagoon and island environment:

Dear Matafele Peinam,
I want to tell you about that lagoon
that lucid, sleepy lagoon
lounging against the sunrise

Men say that one day
that lagoon will devour you

They say it will gnaw at the shoreline
chew at the roots of your breadfruit trees
gulp down rows of your seawalls
and crunch your island’s shattered bones (8-17)

The connection of baby to mother and island is set against those who have threatened Islander life: “they say you, your daughter / and your granddaughter, too / will wander rootless / with only a passport to call home” (18-24). “[T]hey” are the “Men” who “say that one day / that lagoon will devour you” (12-13). And even though the lagoon is said to do the devouring, it is “mother ocean” (33) that prevails. What threatens baby Matafele and her future descendants is not the ocean. Jetñil-Kijiner’s use of repetitive plosive consonants (here: b, p, g and c sounds) enforce where the real threat is coming from:

no greedy whale of a company sharking through political seas
no backwater bullying of businesses with broken morals
no blindfolded bureaucracies gonna push
this mother ocean over
the edge (30-34)

The threat Jetñil-Kijiner addresses is global capitalism, which has turned companies into “greedy whales”, made businesses into bullies and obscured the vision of governments into “blindfolded bureaucracies”. The poem can be read as a feminist statement that foregrounds maternal and matriarchal kinship and restores its connection to motherland and mother ocean.³⁶ Jetñil-Kijiner uses the maternal figure alongside the fluidity of water to disrupt capitalist-colonial strategies of climate change denialists, of those “who like to pretend / that we don’t exist” (55-56), and questions the inaction of the global leaders she directly addresses at the UN in 2014. Expanding on these ideas of fluidity and feminist critique and drawing on twentieth century French feminist theory and twenty-first century feminist materialisms, I explore the way Jetñil-Kijiner reinterprets the connections between the fluid and the maternal, from a Marshallese perspective.

Aqueous Feminist Theories and Radioactive Snow

[W]e are made up of these elements [...] and we live them.

— Luce Irigaray, *Sexes and Genealogies*

Analysing the maternal alongside the notion of fluid and fluidity was a topic of significance for second wave French feminist theory. The work of Luce Irigaray, Hélène Cixous and Julia Kristeva from the 1970s and 80s is deeply concerned with the feminine, the maternal, the fluid and flow. In Cixous’ “The Laugh of the Medusa” (1976), feminine writing — *l’écriture féminine* — is offered as an alternative to the oppressive rational logic of what Australian feminist philosopher Genevieve Lloyd has called “the Man of Reason” and the gendering of rationality in Western thought. In *The Man of Reason: ‘Male’ and ‘Female’ in Western Philosophy* (1984), Lloyd argues that “the maleness of the Man of Reason [...] is not [a] superficial linguistic bias. It lies deep in our philosophical tradition” (xviii). The masculinised character of Western philosophical history has continued into modern conceptualisations of dualistic distinctions between, for instance, nature and culture, reason and emotion, male and

³⁶ Another important figure in both the work of Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner and Craig Santos Perez is that of the ‘island’. For a detailed discussion of the importance of the island in contemporary Anthropocene humanities scholarship, see for instance Elizabeth DeLoughrey’s *Allegories of the Anthropocene* (2019) for a discussion of the island as a trope and allegory that is central to the universalizing figure of the Anthropocene. Like the ocean, that I centralise in this dissertation in order to unpack climate colonial entanglements, the tropical island has long been fetishized “due to the long history of European colonization of Caribbean and Pacific archipelagoes” (166).

female, with the maleness of reason, culture and science inscribed as superior to its female counterpart.

To upset these dualistic and hierarchical conceptualisations, feminine writing is an embodied and corporeal mode of writing that aims to disrupt the phallogocentric history and philosophical legacies of thought. Particular reference to the fluidity of feminine writing can be found in Cixous' explanation of the fluidity of pleasure and desire: "I, too, overflow; my desires have invented new desires, my body knows unheard-of songs" (Cixous 876). Belgian-French feminist philosopher Luce Irigaray works through the homophonic French *mère* (sea) and *mere* (mother) and writes about water and the maternal in *Marine Lover of Friedrich Nietzsche* (1980). She points out that even though the feminine is absent in Nietzsche's thought, feminine and maternal waters made him and his work possible. In *The Will To Power* (1885) Nietzsche sets out to describe the world as "a monster of energy, a sea of forces". He explains that the world is a singular space, at once solid and fluid, definite and somehow eternal. His world makes a hard distinction between presence and non-presence. Surrounded by "nothingness", it is a definite space and strangely infinite in its singularity. Nietzsche writes:

This world: a monster of energy, without beginning, without end; [...] enclosed by 'nothingness' as by a boundary; not something blurry or wasted, not something endlessly extended, but set in a definite space as a definite force [...] a sea of forces flowing and rushing together, eternally changing, eternally flooding back, with tremendous years of recurrence, with an ebb and a flood of its forms. (Nietzsche, *The Will To Power* §1067)

As a result, he sees no beginning to this world, supposing a binary universe of oppositional forces and an equilibrium of eternal self-creation. The metaphor of the sea, particularly its force and fluidity, features prominently in his explanation of what the world is. Even now, more than a century later, to imagine the world as a large body of water, or a 'blue marble', has not left the cultural imagination, nor has it stopped informing scientific epistemologies of the origins of life on Earth. Hypotheses about the start of earthly life have, of course, drastically changed. Earth is now no longer seen as a space with definite boundaries, but as a small part of an ever-expanding universe. Still, the idea that life on Earth had liquid origins, beginning on Earth or even extra-terrestrially, is prevalent.

Arguments against Nietzsche's characterisation of a world bound by monstrous fluid forces have come from feminist thought that critiques this 'masculine imaginary'. In *Marine*

Lover of Friedrich Nietzsche, Irigaray subverts Nietzsche's fear of water by pointing out the omission of the feminine in his thought.³⁷ Irigaray's philosophy emphasises sexual difference and reclaims philosophy for women and for the feminist movement. She points out how binary distinctions between man/woman, masculine/feminine have historically been exploited and defined by mischaracterisations of the fluid, the maternal and the feminine and, as Judith Butler puts it, "that in fact the feminine is precisely what is excluded in and by such binary opposition" (*Bodies that Matter* 38). Materialist feminist theorist Astrida Neimanis emphasises the importance of Irigaray's work for thinking about polluted and commodified twenty-first century capitalist waters in "Thinking with Matter, Rethinking Irigaray: A 'Liquid Ground' for Planetary Feminism" (2016). "Water", she writes, is now repeatedly equated with "life [...]" but thinking with Irigaray underscores that this is a life that intimately connects our own individual emergence from a maternal, watery womb to multispecies planetary survival" (42). To think about water with Irigaray reinforces the importance of thinking about the continued liquid beginnings of life on Earth.

As Neimanis outlines, the work of Irigaray has been controversial as it proved difficult to categorise in late twentieth century debates concerned with essentialism and constructivism. To some, the focus on the material nature of the sexed body in Irigaray's work constituted an essentialist vision of 'woman' and a narrow understanding of the diversity of what constitutes women's bodies.³⁸ Neimanis, however, contends that with the steady undoing of the nature/culture binary in the 'third feminist wave', the positioning of Irigaray's work as either 'essentialist' or 'constructivist' has steadily lost importance. The body, whether called 'woman' or otherwise, is now seen as at once materialdiscursive and agential by feminist theories held together by umbrella terms like 'new materialism' or 'feminist materialisms'.³⁹ Feminist scholarship has steadily made way for work that considers matter as vibrant (Jane Bennet, *Vibrant Matter* (2003)) and "lively in a way that destabilizes anthropocentric and humanist ontological privilege" (Neimanis, "Thinking with Matter" 45). This means that engaging with the maternal/womb from French feminist psychoanalytic perspectives should not be

³⁷ See Astrida Neimanis discussion on the "'amorous dialogue' between the textual avatars (presumably) between Irigaray and Nietzsche" (80) in *Bodies of Water* (2017) for a feminist phenomenological discussion of femininity in Irigaray's text and the way Nietzsche "betrays a fear and disavowal of the watery element to which his birth is nonetheless indebted" (80).

³⁸ See for instance Toril Moi's *Sexual/Textual Politics* (1985), Christine Fauré's "The Twilight of the Goddesses, or the Intellectual Crisis of French Feminism" (1981) and Diana Fuss' explication of the critique of Irigaray's work in *Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature and Difference* (1989).

³⁹ See Karen Barad *Meeting the Universe Halfway* (2007) and a closer analysis of feminist materialisms in chapter one, "Blue Ocean Theories".

understood as prioritizing a biological essentialism. As Neimanis notes, water and the fluidity of the maternal are always concerned with the more-than-human and are “not limited to the human body” (49). Coming to a reciprocal and responsive ethics of the aqueous and the maternal, she concludes that what Irigaray’s work does in this current moment is to “facilitate an attention to sexually different bodies and their relation to water as contiguous [sic] with, rather than separate from, care and concern for rivers, glaciers, and aquifers” (60-61). Neimanis proposes a multispecies and multigenerational approach to ‘bodies of water’:

We, bodies of water that are not all the same. An invitation to think our planetary waters as both extensive and intimate, as both common and different, as multispecies and multigenerational, may be precisely what we need to world a specifically feminist ethics of responsivity, for our time (61, italics original).

Neimanis’ aqueous and fluid feminist ethics subverts masculinist and humanist ideas about water and replaces these with the material and the maternal: water as a force of life.

How, then, to connect these contemporary feminist ideas about water, the maternal and fluidity to Jetñil-Kijiner’s video poetry and performances? Jetñil-Kijiner’s work connects the notion of ‘water is life’, as an extensive vision of multispecies life on Earth, to the intimate waters that are also invoked in Neimanis’ writing. *Iep Jāltok* draws a clear line from colonial capitalism and climate change denialism to Pacific/Pasifika bodies, via Jetñil-Kijiner’s own maternal body and her baby’s body: the kinds of bodies that in the colonial logic of capitalist economies are made to disappear along with their island homes. *Iep Jāltok* entangles climate change presents and futures with the colonisation of the region and the devaluing of the feminine and maternal.

In a poem called “History Project” the speaker, an adult Kathy, explains how fifteen-year-old Kathy undertook a history project on nuclear testing in the Marshall Islands because she felt it was “time to learn my own history” (line 4). The history of the Marshall Islands is grim and submerged in close to four hundred years of colonial occupation and exploitation. The Spanish, the German, the Japanese and the Americans all took part in colonising the Marshall Islands between 1526 and 1979, the year the island nation regained its independence. After taking over control from the Japanese who had occupied the Marshall Islands since the start of First World War, the United States used the Marshall Islands as a testing site for nuclear weapons between 1946 and 1958: “atomizing entire islands, blanketing the twenty-two populated atolls with dangerous levels of radioactive fallout, creating a nation that has been

forever changed by the toxic and mutagenic nature of nuclear militarism” (Johnston 140). The dropping of atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945 had launched the start of the nuclear age (Ackland and McGuire) and, as some argue, the Anthropocene (Zalasiewicz et al. “When did the Anthropocene Begin”). On the northern atolls of the Marshall Islands, the U.S. performed sixty-seven atomic and hydrogen bomb tests. To compare, the total explosive yield of these nuclear bombs was the equivalent of more than seven thousand Hiroshima bombs (Johnston 144). Most of the nuclear detonations took place on or above Bikini Atoll. The twenty-three surface and subsurface thermonuclear experiments that were conducted there have made the atoll uninhabitable: the half-life of plutonium that has contaminated this soil means that Bikini Atoll and “many others in the heavily contaminated northern atolls, have been declared off-limits to human life for the next 24,000 years” (Johnston 148).

Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner’s work embodies this history and fights against its continuation. In “History Project” her research is held together by the experiences of her family and the wider Marshallese community: “I weave through book after article after website / all on how the U.S. military once used / my island home / for nuclear testing [...] I’m not mad / I already knew all of this” (5-8,17-18). A litotes, because while Kathy is sane, her anger radiates off the page. The poem is steeped in sarcasm as she reiterates the lies her ancestors were told: “We mistook radioactive fallout / for snow / *God will thank you* they told us / like God’s just been / waiting / for my people / to vomit / all of humanity’s sins / onto impeccable white shores” (65-74, italics original). The phrases “God will thank you” and “for the good of mankind” return repeatedly to reinforce the deceit and genocide the Marshallese have been forced to endure. This poem and others that accompany it in *Iep Jāltok* are full of the consequences of nuclear war on Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner’s family: her niece Bianca Lanki, for instance, dies from leukaemia aged eight. The Marshallese suffer one of the highest rates of cancer and radiation-related birth defects, stillbirths and miscarriages in the world (Simon et al. 118). In “Fishbone Hair”, a poem dedicated to Bianca, Jetñil-Kijiner recounts how she found ziplock bags “stuffed” with “rolls” of the hair her niece lost during chemotherapy. Literary critic Michelle Keown compares Bianca’s “rootless hair / that hair without a home” to “the exile of the nuclear nomads of the northern atolls” (Keown 943). The young girl becomes the nuclear testing site. Her cells fight the slow invasion of radiation poisoning decades after nuclear bombs were detonated. In the poem “Bursts of Bianca”, her smiles “radiate” from her hospital gown. The women in Jetñil-Kijiner’s poetic world all fight for their lives and those of their families. Bianca fights the colonisation of her cells, Kathy fights the colonisation of her world via foreign armies, nuclear warfare and capitalist industries that are still profiting from the continued dispossession of the

Marshallese. The maternal, the mother, the baby, the ocean and the nucleus of a cell are connected in their relation to the impact of climate colonialist laws and imperial nuclear powers on Pacific bodies — human and nonhuman.

Bikini(s), Babies and Nuclear Testing

The Pacific Ocean [...] still churns with its colonial and nuclear legacies.

Bikini epitomizes these legacies.

— Teresia K. Teaiwa, “Bikinis and Other S/Pacific N/Oceans”

In 1946 the United States started testing nuclear weapons on Bikini Atoll, part of the Republic of the Marshall Islands, dislocating and displacing its inhabitants to surrounding islands in the decades to come. In “Bikinis and Other S/pacific N/oceans” (1994), I-Kiribati-American poet and scholar Teresia K. Teaiwa connects the nuclear testing on Bikini to that other bikini: the two-piece bathing suit that was launched the same year and same month as the first atomic bomb hit its island namesake. As Teaiwa notes: “[t]he bikini bathing suit is testament to the recurring tourist trivialization of Pacific Islanders’ experience and existence” (88). The connection between bomb and bathing suit is deliberate. French designer Louis Réard launched the bikini on 5 July 1946, four days after the first test on Bikini Atoll took place, to “celebrate the Allied efforts in World War II” (91). By problematizing their entanglement, Teaiwa connects the militarisation of the Marshall Islands to the simultaneous making visible and making invisible of white women’s bodies and Pacific bodies respectively:

The sacrifice of Islanders and military personnel during nuclear testing in the Pacific cannot be represented without threatening the legitimacy of colonial power, so nuclear technology becomes gendered and domesticated. In the end the female body is appropriated by a colonial discourse to successfully disguise the horror of the bomb. (92)

In the work of Jetñil-Kijiner, the female body and the nuclear bomb are juxtaposed once again. However, rather than using a bikini-clad white female body to disguise the consequences of colonial and nuclear terror, the poet reverses the logic of the bikini. She makes the bodies of the Pacific women visible to show how they bear the traces of nuclear testing.

Nuclear testing on the Marshall Islands did not end with the first two tests on Bikini in 1946 and the past decade has seen increased media attention to the circumstances on the neighbouring Enewetak Atoll, where nuclear waste is leaking from a concrete dome. On one of the islands on the atoll, Runit Island, nuclear waste was buried and covered in a concrete layer called the 'Runit Dome' or 'Cactus Dome' after the bomb codenamed *Cactus* left a crater upon detonation on 6 May 1958. Despite continued protest of the Enewetak people, between 1977 and 1979 more than four thousand U.S. servicemen gathered substantial amounts of radioactive surface material, ground it into "a concrete slurry, and pumped it into the bottom of the Cactus crater, along with 437 plastic bags of plutonium fragments that crews that picked off the ground and over 104,000 cubic yards of contaminated soil" (Jetñil-Kijiner, "New Year, New Monsters, New Poems"). The structure resembles a concrete UFO, or a pregnant abdomen about to give birth to a toxic nuclear child. Effectively, the U.S. treated the Marshall Islands according to what Elizabeth DeLoughrey explains is the longstanding myth and metaphor of the 'island laboratory', which "displaces the inhabitants of these islands who must be suppressed in order to naturalize the islands as nuclear testing zones and laboratories, bereft of human history" ("The Myth of Isolates" 176). This myth that renders islands empty and void of human culture is accompanied by the 'lie of isolation', which in the Pacific Ocean has been particularly potent as the islands have been consistently cast as exceptionally remote — the perfect testing grounds and waters for nuclear experiments. For as DeLoughrey notes, the "lie of isolation has [...] been a dangerous game, to the Marshall Islanders especially and beyond. Due to these thermonuclear weapons, the entire planet is permeated with militarized radiation" (179).

Atolls are made of porous coral and covering a nuclear crater with a concrete dome would have never held radioactive material inside for long. However, the U.S. government concluded in the 1970s that lining the bottom of the dome with concrete would be too expensive. As a result, ocean water permeates the dome. Cracks have appeared on the surface and, now that sea levels are rising, ocean water rushes over the dome on bad weather days, connecting climate and nuclear colonialisms, or what Winona LaDuke and Ward Churchill call 'Radioactive Colonialism': "The new colonialism is radioactive; what it does can never be undone" (73). Following LaDuke and Churchill, Karen Barad writes that "the temporality of radioactive colonialism is not of a past that is passed, or even decays with time, but rather, an ongoingness that is present; and at the same time, as it were, the particularity of its nuclear nature is such that it has already colonized the future as well, making evident that nuclearity in its specificity radically scrambles, if not disassembles, the imperialist universalizing

sequentiality of past-present-future” (“After the End of the World” 525). Soil testing in 2013 concluded that the surrounding soil is already more contaminated with radioactive material than the interior of the dome. The radioactive material is slowly seeping out and the people of Enewetak Atoll fear what will happen if the dome cracks open. More than seventy years have passed since the first nuclear testing and the Marshall Islanders still experience the effects of radiation pollution. In Jetñil-Kijiner’s “History Project”, these effects become material and concrete:

I read firsthand accounts
of what we call
jelly babies
tiny beings with no bones
skin—red as tomatoes
the miscarriages gone unspoken
the broken translations
I never told my husband
I thought it was my fault
I thought
there must be something
wrong
inside me (lines 25-37, italics original)

In the poems “History Project” and “Monster”, Jetñil-Kijiner emphasises the silence around the trauma born of Marshallese women, the result of exposure or inherited radiation and the ingestion of contaminated local foods. In a post on her personal webpage, Jetñil-Kijiner explains that “Monster” was inspired by her research on the *mejenkwaad*, a Marshallese woman demon “hungry for babies and pregnant women” (“Monster”, line 20). The *mejenkwaad* is “known as one of the most ominous characters in our legends and stories” (Jetñil-Kijiner, “New Year, New Monsters, New Poems”). She devours babies, pregnant mothers, canoes and even entire islands. Jetñil-Kijiner notes that the legend may have been created as an allegory to make it possible to talk about postpartum depression, a condition that can express itself through symptoms such as irritability, a deep sadness or difficulty in parent-child bonding. Jetñil-Kijiner herself suffered from a postpartum depression after giving birth to her daughter and compares her postpartum experiences to feeling like a monster, like the *mejenkwaad*. She

speculates: “I wondered if this must have been how the mothers who gave birth to jelly babies first felt. I wondered if they considered themselves monsters” (“New Year, New Monsters, New Poems”). “Jellybabies” or “monster babies” are how the Marshallese describe the children born after the radiation hit the islands: these children are also likened to “‘octopuses’, ‘apples’, ‘turtles’ and other things in our experience” (“New Year, New Monsters, New Poems”). The Marshallese do not have “words for these kinds of babies because they were never born before the radiation came” (ICJ 1995, as cited by Johnston 142). These are the words of Lijon Eknilang, a Marshallese nuclear survivor who recounted the aftermath as a testimony to the International Court of Justice in 1995 as part of the body of evidence that declared that “the threat or use of nuclear weapons was a violation of international humanitarian law” (Johnston 144). The sea-creature metaphors used to describe children born bearing the marks of radiation exposure reiterate connections between the oceanic and the feminine maternal.

Jetñil-Kijiner connects the monstrous of the mejenkwaad to the horrors and continued trauma born of Marshallese women. She asks: “what if the mejenkwaad was not eating her child as a brutal act — but was instead attempting to return her child to her body — that in consuming her child, she was returning the child to her first home?” (Jetñil-Kijiner, “New Year”). Michelle Keown likens Jetñil-Kijiner’s rendering of the monstrous maternal to the abject and a “Kristevan return to the womb/chora [...] as an ultimate act of compassion by the mejenkwaad-as-mother reabsorbing a child deformed by radiation poisoning” (Keown 595). Feminist psychoanalyst and artist Bracha Ettinger extends a Kristevan feminist psychoanalytic reading of the chora in her psychoanalytic theoretical work on the ‘matrixial’ — meaning ‘of the womb’ (matrix). The biggest difference between Kristeva’s and Ettinger’s theories of the womb and the subjectivity of the other is that Kristeva’s theory of abjection locates the formation of the subject “only postnatally in progressive stages of separation from the *maternal body*, which must be abjected” (Pollock 49, italics original). Ettinger on the other hand, emphasises what she calls ‘borderlinking’ and ‘matrixiality’, which does not follow pallocentric ideas of “splitting separation and cutting the child from what is posed as undifferentiated cloth” (Pollock 49). Instead, Ettinger theorises and shifts the Kristevan idea of the chora to “subjects that meet in the Matrix [and] recognize one another without knowing one another” (123), indicating no postnatal separation but continuous connection. Ettinger proposes to add “the primal phantasy of the devouring mother” to the classical Freudian/Lacanian list of primal phantasies: “Origin in terms of Birth of Primal Scene, Seduction, Castration, and Oedipus” (Ettinger, “From Proto-Ethical Compassion to

Responsibility” 106). Ettinger’s devouring mother bridges the lack of recognition of specifically maternal and mother/daughter desires of identification in psychoanalytic theory.

The monstrous maternal in Jetñil-Kijiner’s work is reminiscent of Ettinger’s description of the “primal phantasy” of the ‘devouring mother’. Ettinger writes: “upon the thread of the *phantasmatic devouring mother* feelings of anxiety arising from different sources including the maternal source (and amplified by real over-domineering) are registered. This primal phantasy digests and elaborates anxieties of being invaded and penetrated” (107, italics original). Jetñil-Kijiner’s “Monster” ends with these lines:

The child is struggling for breath. Struggling in pain. She wants to bring the
child peace. Bring her home. Her first home. Inside her body.
It is an embrace. It is only. An embrace. She kneels next to the body.
And inhales. (41-46)

The monstrous mother in Jetñil-Kijiner’s poem inhales the child back into her body. This act is triggered by radioactive penetration, yet as Ettinger suggests, these phantasies are not just “caused by something” but are primal, arising from a notion of difference “based on webbing of links and not on essence” (Ettinger, *Matrixial Borderspace* 110), a difference that diffracts, thereby vanishing the distinction between subject and object, between self and other: “m/Other”, Ettinger would call this. The maternal demon mejenkwaad existed well before the colonial nuclear testing on the northern Marshall Islands. The image of the devouring mother asserts itself again to address the mother/infant/nuclear bomb entanglement. The mother-as-mejenkwaad, as mother ocean, as mother of the creatures of the sea is a powerful image that resonates with Jetñil-Kijiner’s plight for the recognition of Marshall Islander suffering and fight for a better future for her people.

This is why the image of baby Matafele Peinam resonates strongly with the audience at Jetñil-Kijiner’s performance at UN Climate Summit. The voices of Marshall Islanders have been silenced for decades, but the happy laughter of baby Matafele Peinam in the video and on stage stands for more than hope against the effects of climate change. There is a collectivity that shines through in Jetñil-Kijiner’s work. The video for “Monster” is shot in Hiroshima, in front of the Genbaku dome, another dome connected to nuclear warfare and the only structure left standing near the hypocentre of the atomic blast of 1945. It connects Marshallese and Japanese women, who similarly had to bear the burden of nuclear warfare. It connects nuclear colonial warfare to climate change presents and futures. When in “Two Degrees” Jetñil-Kijiner

describes what she does as “writing the tide” and “willing the world to find its balance” (94, 96-7), she brings activism born in the Pacific to mother ocean and mejenkwaad to one of the biggest stages in the world, so that no one will forget that “there are faces / all the way out there [...] not yet / under water” (“Two Degrees”, 104-105).

Craig Santos Perez: The Militarisation of ‘Water is Life’

On some maps, Guam doesn’t exist; I point to an empty space in the Pacific and say, “I’m from here.” On some maps, Guam is a small, unnamed island; I say, “I’m from this unnamed place.” On some maps, Guam is named “Guam, u.s.a” I say, “I’m from a territory of the United States.” On some maps, Guam is named, simply, “Guam”;
I say, “I am from ‘Guam.’”

— Craig Santos Perez, *from unincorporated territory [hacha]*⁴⁰

Neither my local nor university library carried any of the four titles in Craig Santos Perez’s multibook *from unincorporated territory* series, *hacha*, *saina*, *guma’*, and *lukao*, so I ordered them via the document delivery service the university library offers — a helpful service as it almost always works out that the books can be sourced from a library elsewhere in the world. The books are then flown in from across the world so that I can continue my research. Earlier, Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner’s *Iep Jāltok* was sent to me from the University of Pennsylvania. Perez’s *from unincorporated territory* series came from several libraries around Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand: the National Library of Australia, Sydney University Library, Auckland Libraries, and the University of Otago Library. While I try to avoid overusing these kinds of resources and am cognisant of my personal carbon footprint, it is unsurprising that these texts came to me from around and across the Pacific, given how access and privilege in a capitalist system often comes with a negative impact on natural resources. As I argue in relation to the work of Jetñil-Kijiner, the connection drawn between climate colonialism, capitalist colonial capitalism and climate change activism is important to current poets and scholars from the

⁴⁰ On the 15 February 2010, the official name of what was then known as Guam changed to Guåhan. Documentation by the Governor of Guåhan, Felix P. Camacho, details that the name change is to “instil Indigenous ownership” (www.omnidawn.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Executive-Order.jpg). Guåhan can be translated from Chamoru to English as “a place that has” or “[we] have”. The name Guåhan refers to the self-sustaining nature of the island. Perez alludes to the paradoxical nature of this name in light of its current status: “‘Guåhan’, which translates as *[we] have*. As in *[we] have* serious identity issues because our original meaning has been translated as ‘lost.’” (“*from the legends of juan malo (a malalogue)*”, *from unincorporated territory [lukao]*, p. 28, italics original).

Pacific. This connection is likewise strong in Craig Santos Perez's work. I examine how his work traces a response to the continued colonisation of his home island Guåhan (Guam) and the intersections of U.S. militarisation with the exploitation of the islands' environmental resources. Moreover, expanding on the notion of 'water is life', Perez's works shows how the struggle for Indigenous water sovereignty has informed the embodiment of an Anthropocene poetics for the Pacific that centres on genealogies and a multidirectional notion of time and space.

From Imperial Terripelago to Book-Island

In the 2015 paper "Transterritorial Currents and the Imperial Terripelago", Perez, a poet-scholar from Guåhan and an Associate Professor at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, defines the U.S. as a "terripelago": at once territory and archipelago, given its extensive empire and occupation of sixteen territories that include Guåhan and the Northern Mariana Islands, American Samoa, Johnston Atoll, the U.S. Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico. He argues that while the idea of an archipelago draws on bridged spaces rather than closed territories, it is "essential to foreground the history and process of territoriality that structure the origins and ongoing formations of American empire" (619). Guåhan is one of the larger Pacific islands. After colonisation by the Spanish from 1668 and 1898, Guåhan was occupied by the United States and, alongside Cuba, Puerto Rico and the Philippines, eventually ceded by Spain under the Treaty of Paris on 10 December 1898, which put an end to the Spanish-American war. Japan then occupied the island for 31 months between 1941 and 1944, shortly after it attacked the naval base at Pearl Harbor in Honolulu on 7 December 1941. The United States recaptured Guåhan from the Japanese after the Second Battle of Guåhan that took place between 21 July and 10 August 1944. Guåhan and the Chamoru (Chamorro) people have thus had to endure centuries of colonisation and warfare, without ever becoming part of the United States. In the preface of *from unincorporated territory [hacha]* (2008) Perez explains the legality of the American empire: "the United States can hold a territory as a colonial possession without ever incorporating the territory into the United states or granting sovereignty to the territory, keeping the inhabitants in a state of political disenfranchisement" (9). It is this disenfranchisement that Perez fights in both his scholarly work and his poetry.

Perez's work resists the erasure of Guåhan and the Chamoru people. As he notes in the epigraph to this section, Guåhan is often absent on maps of the United States as well as from the American cultural imaginary. Ironically, Guåhan's official slogan as the westernmost

territory of the United States in the Pacific is “When America’s Day Begins”. Perez’s ongoing poetry series *from unincorporated territory* refers to the official status of Guåhan as an ‘organised unincorporated territory’ of the United States. At this moment in time, there are four books in this multi-book project: *[hacha]* (2008), *[saina]* (2010), *[guma’]* (2014), and *[lukao]* (2017). His work is a critical response to the militarisation of Guåhan and an attempt to imaginatively decolonise its present and future by untangling the connections between the United States as a colonial empire and current oceanic and climate change realities.⁴¹

Perez’s poetry plays with the conventions of poetic genre. His multi-book series is inspired by a tradition of ‘long poems’ such as Ezra Pound’s *Cantos*, William Carlos Williams’ *Paterson* and Charles Olson’s *Maximus*, as well as poetry that escapes the confines of the single collection, such as Nathaniel Mackey’s “Songs of the Andoumboulou”. *from unincorporated territory* draws on both these poetic forms as well as a host of other forms and techniques. The series “*from aerial roots*” and “*from tidelands*” appear in multiple books and indicate an open-endedness to the multi-book series as a whole. The preposition ‘from’ starts every poem in the series, either in English or Chamoru (*ginen*). In “*ginen (sub)aerial roots [13° 28’ 0” N / 144° 46’ 59” E]*” Perez explains:

I’ve never been able to write a poem about the day *from*
indicates a particular time or place as a starting point my
 family left Guåhan *[we] have*. As years passed, details faded
from refers to a specific location as the first of two limits.
 Who came to the airport to say good-bye? What did I carry
from imagines a cause an agent an instrument a source or

⁴¹ Perez is a prominent scholar of Pacific literature, with particular focus on Chamorro literatures and cultural studies, and has published a wide range of articles on poetry, the blue humanities and island studies in the past decade. A monograph called *Navigating CHamoru Poetry: Indigeneity, Aesthetics, and Decolonization* (2021) was recently published by the University of Arizona Press. Perez’s work has moreover been increasingly researched by scholars of Pacific literature, island and ocean studies and ecocriticism. Both Perez’s and Jetñil-Kijiner’s poetry appeared in the anthology *Indigenous Literatures from Micronesia* (2019), edited by Evelyn Flores and Emelihter Kihleng and published by University of Hawaii Press. Perez’s work has, moreover, been analysed in Elizabeth DeLoughrey’s “Toward a Critical Ocean Studies for the Anthropocene” (2019), and “Island Studies and the US Militarism of the Pacific” (2020). Other recent articles on Perez’s work include Bonnie Etherington’s “Mapping Modernity in Guam: The Unincorporated Ecologies of Craig Santos Perez’s Poetics” (2019), Anne Mai Yee Jansen’s “Writing toward Action: Mapping an Affinity Poetics in Craig Santos Perez’s *from unincorporated territory*” (2019), and Mary A. Knighton’s “Guam, Un-Inc.; or Craig Santos Perez’s Transterritorial Challenge to American Studies as Usual” (2019).

*an origin in my luggage? What was left behind? (from
unincorporated territory [guma'] 17, italics original)*

In this stanza of contrapuntal poetry, the rhythms of the two narratives intertwine. Like the ongoing fight against the territorialisation of Guåhan, Perez' poetry indicates a point of departure. It fosters conversation with itself and within itself. He has called his poetry archipelagic — a “book-island” that “is inhabited by the living and the dead, the human and the nonhuman, multiple voices and silences” (Perez, in Rankine 330). From a Chamoru perspective, this work unsettles poetic conventions by liberating Pacific poetry from the “syntax of America's imperial code” (J. Michael Martinez in Rankine 332). Perez not only entangles multiple poetic rhythms, but also rearticulates notions of time and space via poetic practice. In poems such as “Praise Song for Oceania” and “Chanting the Waters” Perez frames water as a lifegiving force to demilitarise oceanic space.

‘Water is Life’ and the Militarisation of the Ocean

To celebrate World Oceans Day on 8 June 2016, Perez published the ‘poem-film’ “Praise Song for Oceania”, directed by Justyn Ah Chong, which was featured on the United Nations World Oceans Day online portal.⁴² The poem is a tribute to the Pacific, to the ocean as origin, as source and as ancestor. Reminiscent of Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner's work, this poem opens with the speaker praising mother ocean for her generative power:

praise
your capacity
for birth / your fluid
currents and trenchant
darkness / praise your contracting
waves & dilating
horizons / praise our briny

⁴² See Perez, Craig Santos and Justyn Ah Chong. ““Praise Song For Oceania’, poem by Craig Santos Perez, film by Justyn Ah Chong.” *YouTube*, uploaded by craigsantosperez, 15 June 2017, www.youtube.com/watch?v=t6fmeBerLZc, unworldoceansday.org/spotlight-article/praise-song-oceania-film-poem, and Perez, Craig Santos. “Crosscurrents (three poems).” *Across Currents: Connections between Atlantic and (Trans)Pacific Studies* special issue of *Atlantic Studies*, vol. 15, no. 2, 2018, pp. 179-182.

beginning, the source
of every breath / praise
your endless bio-
diversity (Perez and Chong, lines 3-13)

Where Jetñil-Kijiner's poetry focused on the maternal and the connection between mother and child, Perez invokes the ocean as a mother figure and symbol of resistance against the militarisation of the Pacific. The poem-film "Praise Song for Oceania" overlays Perez's reading voice with the sound of breath and heartbeats, further strengthening the image of the Pacific Ocean as a force of life and the poem as a Celanian 'Atemwende'. The idea of 'water is life' runs strong here too, generating an embodied ocean with an 'open body' that breathes and connects human and nonhuman. Perez praises the ocean's "capacity / for renewal" (14-15), and endurance of colonial harm:

praise

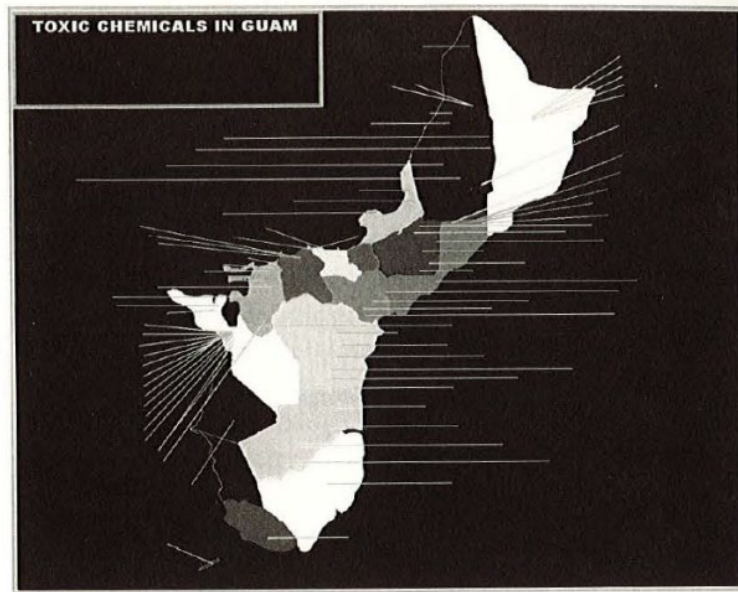
your capacity
to endure / the violence
of those who claim dominion
over you / who map you
empty ocean to pillage / who divide you
into latitudes & longitudes /
who scar your middle
passages / who exploit
your economy* / praise
your capacity
to survive / our trawling
boats / breaching /
your open body / (21-34)

The multiple spiritualities that are invoked in "Praise Song for Oceania" are connected to the colonisation of Oceania, which extends to the current militarisation by U.S. naval forces. Elizabeth DeLoughrey writes that "Perez has rendered visible a military that is too often 'hidden in plain sight'" (27), only thinly veiled by the bright blues of the Pacific Ocean. Perez's

poems critique the Pacific Ocean's inscription by U.S. military discourse and he rewrites the many layers of history and current societal structures. Praising the ocean's endurance against colonial and imperial violence, he rewrites Guåhan's status as 'unincorporated territory of the United States of America' as a story of survival.

In "Toward a Critical Ocean Studies for the Anthropocene" (2019), DeLoughrey argues that a contemporary study of the ocean needs to engage with its past and present militarisation. She invokes the work of Perez and the challenge he poses to the continued military presence in the Pacific region. DeLoughrey notes how Perez counters the U.S. navy by "render[ing] visible the history and depiction of Guåhan as a strategic naval base" (27). DeLoughrey emphasises how Perez "draws extensively on Indigenous voyaging traditions to poetically contest and mitigate the US Navy" (27), a move she likens to positioning "poetry as an oceanic vessel" (27). *from unincorporated territory* contains diverse poetic forms that include free verse poems and prose poems as well as shape poems, interviews and what Perez calls 'poemaps' that visually trace the paths of (for instance) U.S. military bases, transpacific Internet cable networks and toxic chemical contaminations (see Fig. 5). These diverse poetic textures extend a historical and contextual reading of Guåhan through literary form and visual representations. Perez draws on text, image and sound to unsettle the contradictions present in Guåhan, which is at once invisible as a territorial island in the Pacific whose residents cannot vote in U.S. federal elections, and hypervisible in the military interests of the U.S. where it becomes 'USS *Guam*' or Fortress Guam. As DeLoughrey writes, the U.S. Navy "has long devoted its budgets to the visual representation of its military power at sea, suggesting the mutual imbrication of technoscience and militarism" (22-23). She calls upon the photographic and filmic evidence of the nuclear testing in the Marshall Islands between 1946 and 1962, which are easy to find on video sharing websites such as YouTube, as well as the U.S. Navy current social media presence and marketing strategies for large Pacific military operations such as the Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC) Exercise.⁴³ RIMPAC, the world's largest biennial international maritime activity, was performed for the twenty-seventh time between 17 and 30 August 2020. The U.S. Navy fired at the decommissioned USS *Durham* and sunk the amphibious cargo ship in U.S. territorial waters off the coast of Hawai'i, further adding to the climate colonialisms inflicted on the region and its marine environments.

⁴³ See, for instance, U.S. Navy. "U.S. Navy RIMPAC 2018 Wrap Up." *YouTube*, uploaded by U.S. Navy, 2 Aug. 2018, www.youtube.com/watch?v=8bjwdq0RY6k.



poemap based on “Toxic Chemicals of Guam: More than 100 Dumpsites with T. Chemicals, in a 30x8 Mile Island (Source: US GRAL. Accounting Office; US DoD/FUDs & the US Agency Toxic Substances, Dis.registry), Prepared by Luis Szyfres, MD, MPH--University of Guam.

Fig. 5. **Poemap, Craig Santos Perez.** Perez, Craig Santos. “poemap based on “Toxic Chemicals of Guam: More than 100 Dumpsites with T. Chemicals, in a 30x8 Mile Island”, *from unincorporated territory [lukao]*, Omnidawn Publishing, 2017, p. 41.

RIMPAC brings together the military forces of twenty-five mostly Pacific Rim nations as well as the naval powers of nations with a colonially invested interest in the Pacific, such as the Netherlands and Germany.⁴⁴ In his poemaps, Perez’s work responds to the extensive reach and power of the U.S. empire and the “visual reproduction of its destructive power via sea and airspace” (DeLoughrey 23) through representations of toxic contamination and military control. If we continue the analysis of poetic form in Perez’s poetry and addresses Pacific resistance against climate colonialisms and the continued imperial militarisation of Oceania, what effects do these poems have on the bodies of water and bodies of people they represent?

⁴⁴ In 2018, the naval forces of twenty-seven nations participated in the RIMPAC exercise, including Australia, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, the Netherlands, Aotearoa New Zealand, the Philippines, Singapore, South Korea, United Kingdom and the United States. China was notably “disinvited” by the Pentagon on 23 May 2018, following the re-militarisation of South China Sea. In 2020 twenty-five nations were invited but because of the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic, the exercise was scaled down to include ten nations.

Following similar patterns of repetition to “Praise Song for Oceania”, Perez’s poem “Chanting the Water”, reiterates the anaphora “water is life” at the start of every stanza. The focus on water’s necessity for life on Earth thickens the connection between the ocean, birth and the maternal. “Chanting the Water” was published in *Apogee Journal* in 2016 and performed by Perez at the HumanNature lecture series at the Australian Museum in Sydney on 14 May 2019. As an audience member to this performance, “Chanting the Water” spoke to me for its complex reading of water and its connection to life and death. At the start of the performance, Perez asked the audience to call out “water is life” whenever he tapped the lectern twice with his hand:

water is life becuz our bodies are 60 percent water
becuz my wife labored for 24 hours through wave contractions
becuz our sweat is mostly water and salt
becuz she breathed and breathed and breathed
water is life becuz our lungs are 80 percent water
becuz water broke forth from her body
becuz amniotic fluid is 90 percent water
becuz our daughter crowned like a coral island (lines 3-10)

“Chanting the Water” draws the audience to the crucial function of water for human-earthly survival and reinscribes the audience’s, reader’s and listener’s responsibility for action and duty of care through the repeated chanting of “water is life”. In the first lines, Perez connects his partner’s labour and daughter’s birth to the birth of islands, and to the importance of water for the planet as a whole. Shifting perspectives, he expands the notion of ‘water is life’ to include its precarity and commodification:

water is life because we can’t drink oil
becuz water is the next oil
becuz we wage war over gods and oil and water
water is life becuz only 3 percent of global water is freshwater
becuz more than 1 billion people lack access to clean drinking water (17-21).

As the audience reiterates the line “water is life” and Perez continues to tap the lectern, the lives of the speakers, the Indigenous peoples on the world, the “we” in this poem, become

increasingly uncertain, provoking the question: whose lives are equal to the commodified waters Perez invokes? During the performance at the Australian Museum the voices in the audience grew thinner the more Perez tapped the lectern. Chanting the words “water is life” out loud while being presented with the consequences of water exploitation and systematic disregard for Indigenous land and water claims, in a national museum full of artefacts taken via those same systems of colonial exploitation, opens up the disparity between those in power and those who depend on water sovereignty most. Midway through the poem, Perez highlights the intersection of the commodification of water and the dispossession of land and ocean rights:

becuz corporations steal, privatize, and bottle our waters [...]
water is life becuz we say stop, you are hurting our ancestors
becuz they say we thought this was a wasteland
becuz we say stop, keep it in the ground
becuz they say we thought these bones were fuel
becuz we say stop, water is sacred
becuz they say we thought water was a commodity
(33, 38-43).

“Chanting the Waters” is dedicated “in solidarity with the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe and all peoples protecting the sacred waters of this earth” (1). Running through ancestral lands of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe, the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL) is an 1,886 km long underground oil-pipeline in the United States that transports oil from North Dakota to Illinois. The pipeline became the site of mass protest throughout 2016 and 2017, attracting global attention with the hashtag #NoDAPL. Activists consisting of Indigenous youth, tribe members and allies gathered to resist construction as the pipeline poses significant risks to the water quality and cultural heritage of the Dakota and Lakota peoples. Potawatomi scholar of Environmental and Indigenous studies Kyle Powys Whyte notes: “Part of the DAPL’s construction is occurring on lands and through waters the tribe never ceded consensually to the U.S. and that remain environmentally and culturally significant for tribal members’ safety and wellness” (155). Both the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe and the people of Guåhan are impacted by the dominance of the U.S. empire and its control over land and water sovereignty. The #NoDAPL protests were forcibly ended when a newly-elected President Donald Trump signed an executive order to advance the construction of the pipeline, going against the environmental assessment ordered by the previous president Barack Obama’s administration. Both private

security firms and several state agencies, including U.S. Homeland Security and the National Guard, forced protesters from the site. This example of the militarisation of water sovereignty shows the paradoxical nature of the seemingly straightforward expression ‘water is life’. From several Indigenous perspectives, from the United States, from Guåhan, from the Pacific, water has long been a militarised element under the coloniser’s regulation, which controls a range of bodies including bodies of water, bodies of people and bodies of law.

Bodies of Water, Bodies of Generations to Come

In *Bodies of Water* (2017), Astrida Neimanis identifies the productive work that happens when water is thought of as a ‘body’ and ‘embodied’, and when, by extension, bodies are thought of as aqueous. She argues that “bodies of water” are figurations. Via the work of Donna Haraway and Rosi Braidotti, Neimanis reads figurations as “*embodied concepts*” (5, italics original): as “material-semiotic knots” (Haraway, *When Species Meet*) and “‘living maps’ that acknowledge ‘concretely situated historical positions’” (Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects*, as cited in Neimanis 5).⁴⁵ Bodies of water are dynamic historical and environmental embodiments produced through processes of entanglement. This means that our understanding of water does not precede the concepts we use to engage with it, what Barad calls “spacetime-mattering” (*Meeting the Universe Halfway*) and “posthumanist performativity” (“Posthumanist Performativity”): the idea that phenomena do not precede their relations, or their ‘intra-actions. Bodies of water, such as the Pacific Ocean, are co-constitutive of their historical, spiritual and environmental situation. To fight for these bodies of water, as evidenced in the activism of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe and the poetry of Perez and Jetñil-Kijiner, is therefore an activity closely tied to the rights and sovereignty of the human bodies that were always already part of these more-than-human bodies of water.

The outspoken entanglement of water, birth and life in Perez’s poetry is exemplary of similar debates that are taking place concerning the status of poetry in the Anthropocene. Notions of time and place are imperative for the “Anthropocene poetics” that David Farrier articulates. We “must think differently about the poem as a consequence of the Anthropocene” (5), Farrier suggests. Thinking differently, for Farrier, means that we need to take the theoretical shift that the Anthropocene requires into account when reading poetry in this current

⁴⁵ Figurations are further explored in chapter six, “The Waves, the Ocean”, in relation to Behrouz Boochani’s *No Friend but the Mountains* and the importance of the boat, the border and the body of the refugee in contemporary Australian immigration discourse and literary responses.

time. This shift is one of time and space: “The Anthropocene involves us in a kind of deep-time negative capability, inducting us into the strangeness of a temporality that vastly exceeds both personal experience and intergenerational memory” (5). The idea that the concept of the Anthropocene unsettles previous notions of time and guides us to a consideration of ‘deep time’ has become an increasingly common approach within Humanities scholarship on the Anthropocene.⁴⁶ However, as thinkers such as Kathryn Yusoff, Zoe Todd, Heather Davis, Alice Te Punga Somerville and many others concerned with an anticolonial reading of the Anthropocene and its effects have noted, the idea that our notion of time only now becomes unsettled undermines the experiences of many Black, brown and Indigenous communities who have had their entire worlds upturned by colonialism, imperialism and their capitalist aftermaths:

If the Anthropocene proclaims a sudden concern with the exposures of environmental harm to white liberal communities, it does so in the wake of histories in which these harms have been knowingly exported to black and brown communities under the rubric of civilization, progress, modernization, and capitalism. The Anthropocene might seem to offer a dystopic future that laments the end of the world, but imperialism and ongoing (settler) colonialisms have been ending worlds for as long as they have been in existence. (Yusoff, “A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None” 12-13)

To argue, therefore, that the twenty-first century conceptualisation of the Anthropocene is what has begun to upset these ideas about futurity and linearity of time undoes the lived experience of the ends of worlds (Davis and Todd 2017) that communities like those on Guåhan have already experienced for more than four hundred years. An account of the Anthropocene that does not acknowledge the consequences of imperial and colonial ‘deep-time’ undermines Black, brown and Indigenous agency and the depth of knowledge of those who have already experienced the ends of their worlds.

⁴⁶ Besides David Farrier’s *Anthropocene Poetics* (2019), see, for instance, Nigel Clark’s “Geopolitics and the Disaster of the Anthropocene” (2014), and Dipesh Chakrabarty’s discussions about ‘geological time’ and the humanist shift toward “[a] time when the geological and planetary press in on our everyday consciousness as when we speak of there being ‘excess’ carbon dioxide in the atmosphere—‘excess’ only on the scale of human concerns—or of renewable and nonrenewable sources of energy (nonrenewable on human time scales)” (“Anthropocene Time” 32).

Any Anthropocene poetics that, following Perez’s conceptualisation of the poetic ‘terripelago’, positions islands and archipelagos as sites of colonial interest and anticolonial inspiration, needs to consider these histories in their present moment. A concept that can help to bridge the detachment of ‘deep’ time from ‘imperial’ time is ‘genealogies’. In “*from sourcings*” Perez writes:

what echoes across waters :
 taotaomo’na—
 from ‘taotao’ [‘people’] *ginen* ‘mo’na’ [‘precede’]—
 ‘people of before’ ‘before time ancestors’ ‘ancient people’ ‘people before
 recorded time’ etc

while my ancestors did leave breathe love die *before*
 contact *before*
 colonialism *before*
 history
 taotaomo’na also exist
 in time in
 our histories remembered forgotten
 in our bodies homes words *in*
 every breath ‘*in*

relation to my own body by wave of the page’ and [we]
 will continue *after in*
 all *afters (from unincorporated territory [saina], 13, lines 3-19, italics*
 original)

Genealogy, or what is defined in the Oxford English Dictionary as “an account of one’s descent from an ancestor or ancestors” (“Genealogy”), entangles time and space. Ancestors, those who Perez calls “taotaomo’na” (4), a people of before recorded, imperial time, exist beyond the idea of time as vertically linear and progressive: from ‘then’ to ‘now’. In the work of Perez and other Pacific thinkers, genealogies are not as linear as definitions such as the one in the Oxford English Dictionary suggest: “taotaomo’na also exists / *in time in* / our histories [...] *in* our bodies homes words *in* / every breath” (12-16, italics original). Thinking about genealogies *in*

time and on a continuous plain that entangles space, time and matter emphasises the embodied nature of genealogies. Not only are current bodies connected to the bodies of before, they are already entangled with those to come: “will continue *after in / all afters*” (18-19, italics original).

“Genealogies [...] are not merely endpoints”, Alice Te Punga Somerville writes in “Inside Us the Unborn” (2018): “through them we are connected not only to ancestors but also descendants” (70). The moment of colonisation does not define a starting point or a break in time, but indicates one significant moment in a much more complex and “vast, multidirectional network of connections” (70). In te reo Māori, Te Punga Somerville’s mother tongue, the word for genealogy is *whakapapa*, “a verb as well as a noun” (70) that means to layer: “[w]hakapapa is about collapse in the best possible sense: layers. Layers upon layers. Lines in which verticality is less important than multidirectional relationships” (71). Te Punga Somerville’s paper proposes to employ genealogies and *whakapapa* as method and metaphor for tracing Pacific histories and Pacific futures. She reapproaches Albert Wendt’s famous poem “Inside Us the Dead” through the Tongan poet Karlo Mila’s reply: the poem “Inside Us the Dead (The NZ-Born Version)”. Mila’s poem extends Wendt’s idea that the dead, our ancestors, live inside us by offering a different layer to this genealogy: that of the pregnant body and the descendant. “Inside us the unborn, too” (74) — so Te Punga Somerville summarises Mila’s corrective.

Reading and listening to Craig Santos Perez’s poetry confirms that the genealogy of the ocean is multidirectional. The figure of ‘mother ocean’ in his work upholds the nonlinearity of Anthropocene time and space. The “wave contractions” (“Chanting the Waters”, 4) not only give birth to the future of the Pacific Ocean, but also to its past and present. By displacing the dominance of a singular militarised narrative for Guåhan, Perez reveals that the Pacific has a past, present and future that is inherently oceanic. His archipelagic poetry turns our breath and undoes Western and imperial silencing of Pacific voices.

Conclusion

Futures are therefore in a relationship with the past, but the relationship is not linear; one does not stand on a single plane looking at the past in a way that means a swivel of the head will reveal a view of the future. The risk of focusing on “the dead” is not that it is “morbid” [...] but that our histories, despite being hopefully framed as genealogies, become solely

ancestral rather than dynamically relational.

— Alice Te Punga Somerville, “Inside Us the Unborn”

In the work of Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner and Craig Santos Perez the poetics of the Anthropocene present themselves in specifically Pacific ways. Addressing continued militarisation and nuclearity, their poetry demonstrates parallels between the Marshall Islands and Guåhan, while foregrounding the specific histories, presents and futurity of their home islands. The configurations of Pacific Islands and Pacific people, nations and communities are distinct but connected in their experiences with colonialism, imperialism and changing climates. Teresia K. Teaiwa refers to this as ‘s/pacific’: “a site for comprehending specific social and physical environments and for apprehending generic colonial technologies of marginalization and erasure” (“Bikinis and Other S/Pacific N/Oceans” 96). The political and activist nature of Perez’s and Jetñil-Kijiner’s poetry affirms their contemporary connections. Within the globalised narrative of eco-activism, their work stands firm on contemporary issues such as the increased precarity of Islander life under continued colonial, imperial and capitalist rule.

“[W]riting is itself a medium of continuation and renewal”, South African literary scholar Elleke Boehmer notes in *Postcolonial Poetics* (2018). The anaphoric and repetitive nature of Jetñil-Kijiner’s and Perez’s poetry suggests that their Pacific poetic renewal builds upon firmly situated waters and grounds that are held together by ancestral knowledge and connections, and maternal futurity. Their use of the maternal figure alongside the fluidity and embodied materiality of waters and oceans disrupts colonial imperial strategies. Centuries of militarisation and nuclear warfare waged on Indigenous bodies are uncovered as Jetñil-Kijiner and Perez resist the colonial logic of the West and refuse to essentialise the maternal body into a materiality owned by reproduction for the nation state. The genealogy of the maternal in the Pacific constitutes an open body that is more-than-human in its make-up and includes the key figure of mother ocean. Jetñil-Kijiner’s and Perez’s poetic work invokes visions of an oceanic maternal that are reminiscent of French feminist and feminist new materialist pursuits that counter the essentialising of bodies.

In *Elemental Passions*, Luce Irigaray writes: “A body becomes a prison when it contracts into a whole. When it proclaims itself mine or thine. When a line is drawn around it, its territory mapped out. When the universe of its inner, or outer, possible or permissible, movements is already traced out, as is its life” (17). Jetñil-Kijiner and Perez resist the territorialisation of the body, the maternal, the Pacific, ocean and water. They undo the colonial logic that has tried to hold regions like the Pacific hostage for centuries. This is what Jetñil-Kijiner calls forth when, standing in front of the United Nations, she appeals directly to world leaders and says to her daughter: “we won’t let you drown / you’ll see” (“Dear Matafele Peinam”, 99-100). In the chapter that follows, “Kelp Encounters”, the visual and the textual

effects of erasure and loss are further examined in their connections to lutruwita/Tasmanian underwater kelp environments. Like Jetñil-Kijiner's and Perez's critique of the disappearance of islands and their cultures, the work of Lucienne Rickard and Mandy Quadrio resists simplistic interpretations of species loss and extinction myths. These narratives of resistance share the elements of performance that are also present in Jetñil-Kijiner's and Perez's work. Jetñil-Kijiner's and Perez's poetic texts have roots in slam poetry and spoken word traditions. Both poets have a strong social media presence and share their work through non-traditional publishing networks like YouTube, Vimeo and Twitter. The medium of writing and its narrative resistance becomes more than the sum of its parts in Jetñil-Kijiner's and Perez's intermedial poetic approaches, as well as in the visual performance and installation work of Rickard and Quadrio.

5. Kelp Encounters: Extinction and Resurgence in the Art of Lucienne Rickard and Mandy Quadrio

We speak especially to the older generation of fishers, and they say, ‘When I was your age, this bay was so thick with kelp, we actually had to cut a channel though it [...] Now, those bays, which are probably at the scale of 10 or 20 football fields, are completely empty of kelp.

There’s not a single plant left.

— Cayne Lynton in Emma Bryce, “Tasmania’s ‘Super-Kelp’”

In the underwater kelp forests that surround the south-east coast of lutruwita/Tasmania, the tides are changing. Growing in depths up to forty metres under the sea surface, the semi-closed canopies of the giant kelp plants form a “key and iconic habitat that dominates many nearshore rocky coastlines in temperate and cold-water regions worldwide” (Butler et al. 2). Giant kelp is also known as string kelp: a “large brown algae that grows on rocky reefs” (Department of Sustainability). Several kelp species grow in lutruwita/Tasmania, a region of islands south of the Australian continental mainland, including giant kelp (*Macrosystis pyrifera*) in the deepest coastal waters and bull kelp (*Durvillaea potatorum*) in the shallow edges at the shoreline, both providing crucial habitat for local marine life. They are cold-water species and “the largest and fastest growing marine plants” (Australian Government, Department of Sustainability), generating a vertical structure to the underwater environment that is used as habitat for a wide range of cold-water marine fauna such as the Spotted Handfish (*Brachionichthys hirsutus*) and the Weedy Seadragon (*Phyllopteryx taeniolatus*). The rocky reefs of the lutruwita/Tasmanian coast anchor the giant kelp. But as these most southern Australian waters have started to increase in temperature with great acceleration, the kelp is quickly losing its footing.

Bleached corals and dying reefs have become well-known visible symbols to represent changing underwater Anthropocene environments. Increasingly, in the waters of south-east Australia, the fast disappearance of kelp forests has gained local and national attention, calling upon lutruwita/Tasmanian blue ocean stories. Global warming has not left the ocean untouched and the rise of ocean temperatures “could lead to both the disappearance of some corals due to repeated bleaching events and reductions in kelp forest habitat in the future” (Comeau and Cornwall 1096). Bull kelp has a long history of significance as the material used in lutruwita/Tasmanian Aboriginal cultural and artistic objects such as baskets to carry water, and its potential loss has far-reaching cultural consequences. In this chapter, I dive deeper into these

kelp encounters and trace their blue ocean stories. With the current problem of kelp forest loss in mind, I ask how kelp materialises colonial oceanic connections and address the colonial afterlives present in the way we conceptualise extinction and erasure. In the work of settler-Australian artist Lucienne Rickard and palawa⁴⁷ Tasmanian Aboriginal artist Mandy Quadrio, kelp bridges ocean and shore, showing the entangled nature of the contemporary colonial sea frontier (Cameron ix). The history and proliferation of extinction myths in the Tasmanian context complicates the notion of mass or species extinction in this region. This chapter looks at Rickard's and Quadrio's visual and performance art to emphasise the importance of kelp for both marine diversity and Tasmanian Aboriginal cultural resurgence.

The increasing water temperatures that are associated with climate change are a significant threat not only to kelp but also to a range of lutruwita/Tasmanian marine life. As the East Australian Current (EAC) strengthens and moves further poleward, it brings down warmer and comparatively nutrient-poor waters. The surface water temperature off the coast of eastern lutruwita/Tasmania shows the “greatest rate of warming” (Shears and Bowen 1) of all ocean water in the Southwest Pacific, with an increase of $+0.20^{\circ}\text{C decade}^{-1}$ observed between 1946 and 2016 (Shears and Bowen 1), meaning a 1.4°C increase over the span of 70 years. It is in these warming waters that species such as the Tasmanian Spotted Handfish (*Brachionichthys hirsutus*) and Red Handfish (*Thymichthys politus*) fight against their looming extinction. Australian artist Lucienne Rickard grew up on Lord Howe Island in the Tasman sea and currently works in nipaluna/Hobart, lutruwita/Tasmania. Over the course of her sixteen-month durational performance *Extinction Studies*, on a podium in the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, Rickard drew a total of thirty-five recently declared extinct species with graphite on paper: reptiles, amphibians, plants, insects, birds, mammals, fish, worms and snails. The drawings are large — the dimensions of the sheet of paper were $2 \times 1.5\text{m}$ — and took days, weeks, sometimes months to draw, only to be erased as soon as the last line was drawn, yet leaving their traces superimposed, complicating the idea of extinction on both a local and global

⁴⁷ *palawa* is the *palawa kani* (the constructed Tasmanian Aboriginal language) word used to refer to today's Tasmanian Aboriginal community, that along with the alternative word *pakana*, roughly translates to ‘Man (black)’ and ‘people’: “In *palawa kani*, as the name suggests, *palawa* was originally selected as the word for ‘Tasmanian Aboriginal person/people’ (i.e. ‘Native Tasmanian’), but *pakana* the *palawa kani* word for ‘people’, is also commonly employed as a label for the community” (Berk 12). See Berk's “*Palawa Kani* and the Value of Language in Aboriginal Tasmania”, for a more in-depth analysis of the history of Tasmanian Aboriginal languages and the process of constructing a single Tasmanian Aboriginal language, *palawa kani*, that began in 1992 as “part of a nationwide—and commonwealth funded—Language Retrieval Program” (Berk 3).

scale, ending on an open note, and calling attention to the ongoing nature of extinctions. *Extinction Studies* culminated on 24 January 2021, when Rickard erased the image of the Swift Parrot (*Lathamus discolor*), a not yet extinct but critically endangered parrot that only breeds along the south-eastern coast of lutruwita/Tasmania. In late 2020, as the penultimate drawing, Rickard drew and erased the Smooth Handfish (*Sympterychthys unipennis*). Handfish live in the rocky river bedding and kelp forests of the southern Australian coast, with several species endemic to south-east lutruwita/Tasmania only. Via the figure of the handfish, Rickard addresses the aftermath of the colonisation of Tasmania and its effects on current marine life.

The notion of extinction becomes more complex when analysed from the perspective of Tasmanian Aboriginal history and contemporary resurgence. Mandy Quadrio's kelp work critiques and unsettles the still prevalent narrative that Tasmanian Aboriginal people became 'extinct' when Nuennone woman Truganini⁴⁸ (*Trukanini/Trucanini*) died in 1876, when she was approximately seventy-three years old. Notions of race and genocide complicate this harmful narrative that facilitated consistent attempts to erase Tasmanian Aboriginal cultures, despite their survival. The bull kelp Quadrio uses in her work emphasises the self-determination of contemporary Tasmanian Aboriginal communities. Tasmanian Aboriginal people have long used kelp, harvested from the coastlines, to create intricate baskets that are used to carry fresh water and as drinking vessels. Reconnecting and revitalising these material cultures stresses the importance of the survival of Tasmanian kelp forests.

The Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery (TMAG) plays a crucial role in the afterlives of local colonial extinction narratives and myths, albeit with ethical consequences different from those produced by Rickard's and Quadrio's work. My discussion of Rickard's work draws upon the connections between the layered approach to species extinction in *Extinction Studies* in relation to the permanent exhibit of the Thylacine — also known as the Tasmanian tiger (*Thylacine cynocephalus*) — whose remains are on display two rooms removed from Rickard's performance, and emphasise the consequences of species extinction on both a local and a global scale. How does the location of Thylacine remains in TMAG relate to the layered nature of extinction and ideas about erasure in Rickard's *Extinction Studies*? Thinking about extinction events in relation to TMAG becomes more complex when considering the central role the museum has played to generate and sustain the myth of Tasmanian Aboriginal 'extinction'.

⁴⁸ Truganini's (*Trukanini/Trucanini*) name has been spelled in several different ways over the last two hundred years. Nowadays, the common English spelling is Truganini. In *palawa kani* her name is spelled as *Trukanini* or *Trucanini*. Following double naming practices in Australia, I here include these three iterations throughout.

The fallacies and enduring legacy of Tasmanian Aboriginal human extinction myths can be traced back to the display of Truganini's (*Trukanini/Trucanini*) remains between 1904 and 1947 at TMAG, in an exhibition called "Truganini, The Last Tasmanian Aboriginal" and the racialised propaganda that followed her death in 1876. Quadrio's work *Here Lies Lies* (2019) was exhibited in dark basement of TMAG, a location she describes as "one of the earliest colonialist overlays of palawa people's bones and cultures in Tasmania" (Quadrio, "*Here Lies Lies*"). In *Sovereign Sensuality* (2016) Quadrio reclaims the gendered histories and violations against Tasmanian Aboriginal women via connections between 'black velvet' and bull kelp. Her work critiques the use of extinction discourse in relation to Tasmanian Aboriginal people, through the medium of kelp, connections to Sea Country, and visibility in the exact spaces that are responsible for these narratives of erasure. Looking at the underwater multispecies entanglements in Rickard and Quadrio's work, I focus on concepts such as 'erasure', 'extinction' and 'resurgence' to unfold the connection between contemporary representation of species extinction and the many lives that encounter kelp.

Lucienne Rickard: Multispecies Extinction and the Art of Erasing

For the duration of one month in late 2020, the image of a small extinct fish appeared and then vanished at TMAG in nipaluna/Hobart, lutruwita/Tasmania. The last and only Smooth Handfish (*Sympterychthys unipennis*) that was ever physically accounted for in Western records was the single fish scooped up with a dip net by French zoologist François Péron during a colonial expedition to south-eastern Tasmania in 1802 that was commissioned by Napoleon Bonaparte (Last and Gledhill 56). The handfish species are odd-looking but charismatic creatures. They prefer to use their 'hands', their comparatively large pectoral fins, to crawl over the reef and river bedding. The single Smooth Handfish Péron captured, killed and preserved would become the holotype for the species, the single physical example to describe the species in its entirety. This little, 4.4 cm, single Smooth Handfish (see Fig. 6 and 7) was taken to the Museum National d'Histoire Naturelle in Paris, France, and described in the captain's journal as a little fish "which is unusual in that its foremost fins are exactly like hands" (Last and Gledhill 56). In the two centuries that followed, no other sighting of the Smooth Handfish was ever recorded even as, between February and June 2015, "19 experienced divers at 22 sites across southern Tasmania" went to "search for Ziebell's Handfish and the Red Handfish, which are presumably similar in ecology and distribution to the *S. unipennis*" (Last et al. "Sympterychthys unipennis"). Two hundred and twelve years after it showed itself to the

colonial expeditioners just once, in March of 2020 the International Union for Conservation of Nature's (IUCN) Red List of Threatened Species declared the Smooth Handfish officially extinct.



Fig. 6. **The Smooth Handfish that defined the species.** Preserved holotype of the Smooth Handfish, *Sympterychthys unipennis* - MNHN A 4630, 43.8 mm SL, from Tasmania. *Australian National Fish Collection, CSIRO, Creative Commons by Attribution-Noncommercial.*

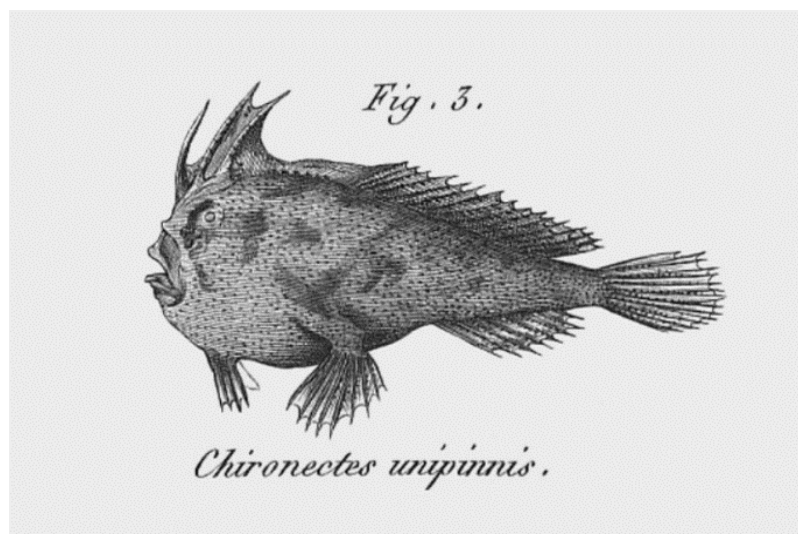


Fig 7. **Illustration of the holotype of the Smooth Handfish.** Smooth Handfish, *Sympterychthys unipennis*, MNHN A 4630, from Tasmania. Cuvier, Georges. *Mémoires du Muséum d'Histoire Naturelle*, vol. 3, 1817, plate 18, p. 418.

Late 2020 and close to where the Smooth Handfish would have once crawled over the sea bottom with its kin, its image came to life and vanished once again. Rickard sourced the species she featured in *Extinction Studies* from those declared extinct since the year 2000 on the IUCN Red List. They include charismatic mammals and birds such as the Christmas Island

Pipistrelle, the Caribbean Monk Seal and the Norfolk Kaka, as well as less commonly alluring species such as snakes, insects, plants and rodents, such as the Bramble Cay Melomys (*Melomys rubicola*), a small nocturnal rodent endemic to a small coral cay in the Torres Strait, Australia. The last individual of the Bramble Cay Melomys was recorded in 2009 and the species was declared extinct in 2014. The storm surges that engulfed the small island are the result of rising sea levels and the slow erosion of Bramble Cay. These surges are said to have caused the Bramble Cay Melomys' extinction, killing individual animals as well as reducing the remaining vegetation they needed to survive (Woinarski et al.). The changing nature of the seas affected the Smooth Handfish too, as well as the remaining handfish that include three endangered Tasmanian species: the Spotted Handfish (*Brachionichthys hirsutus*), Red Handfish (*Thymichthys politicus*) and the Ziebell's Handfish (*Brachiocephalus ziebelli*), the latter of which has not been sighted since 2007. Below, I analyse the affective nature of erasure and extinction in response to Rickard's performance, particularly as it relates to both extinct and endangered kelp-dwellers like the Tasmanian handfish. What happens when extinct species reappear in Rickard's durational performance? And what does it mean that all that remains of their appearance are faint traces on a sheet of paper? The questions 'what is lost?' and 'what remains?' are present in Rickard's durational performance, its precise museum location, and the environments that these extinct species belonged to.

Being in Touch with the Handfish

Electrons, molecules, brittlestars, jellyfish, coral reefs, dogs, rocks, icebergs, plants, asteroids, snowflakes and bees stray from all calculable paths, making leaps here and there, or rather, making here and there from leaps, shifting familiarly patterned practices, testing the waters of what might yet be/have been/could still have been, doing thought experiments with their very being.

— Karen Barad, "On Touching—The Inhuman that Therefore I Am"

At the heart of Karen Barad's article "On Touching—The Inhuman That Therefore I Am" (2012) lies the idea that neither the 'self', the human, nor the notion of touch are comprised of fixed or linear relations. Analysing the notion of touch from a quantum physical perspective, Barad argues for a nonlinear, differential relationality, from the idea that "[e]ven the smallest bits of matter are an unfathomable multitude" (214). Barad's theory of diffraction and intra-action radically redefine relationality, foregoing causal relations in exchange for the endless

and all-encompassing idea that each electron, each molecule, each jellyfish, each coral reef, is always already “threaded through with an infinite alterity diffracted through being and time” (214). In “On Touching” Barad echoes Donna Haraway’s work on companion species and dogs to ask: “Whom and what do we touch when we touch electrons?” (215). Extending Barad’s ideas on touching in the realm of quantum field theory to the appearance and disappearance of the handfish in south-eastern lutruwita/Tasmania and the work of Lucienne Rickard, I ask: whom and what do we touch when we touch the handfish?



Fig. 8. **Hands touching hands.** Lucienne Rickard erases the Smooth Handfish. Rickard, Lucienne. *Extinction Studies*, Durational performance: Graphite on paper, 2x1.5m, Exhibited at: Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery (TMAG), Hobart, Tasmania, Australia, 9 December 2020. Photo author.

In Rickard's performance, extinct species meet and touch each other in ways that did not seem to exist when they were still alive. Like the waves that shape Barad's diffraction theory, species such as the North American Xerces Blue butterfly and the Malaysian *Plectostoma sciaphilum* land snail are superimposed and entangle themselves in their differences, creating higher waves that form diffraction patterns, meet each other, or cancel each other out. The particular iterations of extinction events that Rickard draws encounter each other on paper as a palimpsest, creating new patterns and new relations. In this sense, the notion of who touches whom already becomes more complex and less unidirectional. When the snail touches the butterfly, touches the parrot, touches the handfish, touches Rickard, touches us, the notion of touch shows that these relationships and these events have never been distinct, and instead form intricate patterns of multispecies relationality. Barad explains that touch is integral to understanding matter:

In an important sense, in a breathtakingly intimate sense, touching, sensing, is what matter does, or rather, what matter is: matter is condensations of response-ability. Touching is a matter of response. Each of 'us' is constituted in response-ability. Each of 'us' is constituted as responsible for the other, as [being in touch with the other].⁴⁹ (215)

The graphite pencil and eraser marks become part of the paper, but the shavings pile up on the ground. They move when people walk past and shift the circulating air. Even in their erasure, the extinct species featured in *Extinction Studies* show their inherent entanglement. The drawings do not disappear, but change in their relationship to each other, to the public, and to the remnants that they leave.⁵⁰ When Rickard erased the Smooth Handfish on 9 December 2020, this act not only emphasised their loss, but also simultaneously amplified the plight of the three critically endangered Tasmanian handfish species that still crawl through the kelp

⁴⁹ The last sentence of the original quote in the article as published in *differences* (2012) reads: "Each of 'us' is constituted as responsible for the other, as the other." In conversation about this article with Karen Barad in the context of two-day "Diffracting difference and identity: Masterclass with Karen Barad" on 26-27 September 2018, at Deakin University, Melbourne, they noted that this sentence as published in *differences* is, unfortunately, a misprint. The last phrase of this sentence should not read "as the other" but "as being in touch with the other". I have therefore changed it to its intended meaning in the citation here.

⁵⁰ Beyond the *Extinction Studies* performance some records of the drawings remain. Photos were taken by the public and by Rickard for her personal Instagram account. Moving images and photographs were also commissioned by Detached Cultural Organisation, who funded the project and purchased the remains of the performance after it ended in January 2021. See for instance this short film by RUMMIN Productions on Vimeo: vimeo.com/393838689.

forests and rocky reefs of south-eastern lutruwita/Tasmania. The three species have been part of the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO) run ‘Handfish Conservation Project, which was established in 2018.



Fig. 9. **Burning “Jessica the Handfish”**. Ogoh-Ogoh, burnt in an effigy during the Dark MOFO festival, 21 June 2015. *MONA: Museum of Old and New Art*.

In lutruwita/Tasmania, these endangered handfish, with their distinctive pectoral fins — the hands that they use to crawl through kelp forests and through river and reef bedding — have become local environmental and conservation icons, alongside other charismatic and distinctive species such as the Tasmanian devil (*Sarcophilus harrisii*) and the extinct Thylacine. In 2015, the Spotted Handfish was chosen to feature prominently in a mid-winter festival in lutruwita/Tasmania. During the so-called Dark MOFO festival in Hobart, the Spotted Handfish was the first Ogoh-Ogoh. Burning the Ogoh-Ogoh is a Balinese Hindu tradition that has been adapted for the Tasmanian festival that is run by private museum of Old and New Art (MONA). In the Balinese tradition, artisans build large papier-mâché demons or mythological beings that are set alight on New Year’s Eve carrying away bad spirits with them as they burn. In lutruwita/Tasmania, this has taken the form of burning the fears of the festival attendees on the longest night of the year in the Southern hemisphere. In 2015, Balinese artists Ida Bagus Oka, Ida Bagus Antara and Komang Sedana Putra, made three large papier-mâché Ogoh-Ogoh’s: two traditional Balinese sculptures and a Tasmanian adaptation, a monstrous version of the Spotted Handfish (see Fig. 9) that the artists named Jessica. The festival audience was prompted to write notes detailing their biggest fears to put inside the Ogoh-Ogoh during the festival. In a parade on 22 June 2015, the Ogoh-Ogoh and all the fears it held were burned. In

the burning of both the handfish along with human fears, human and handfish touch, invoking, to use Barad words, the idea that “[s]o much happens in a touch: an infinity of others—other beings, other spaces, other times—are aroused” (206).

The status of the handfish as an iconic Tasmanian species is driven by its eccentric appearance, but even more so, by its current endangered status that is entangled with the human touch it has endured. Barad writes that “[t]ouch is never pure or innocent. It is inseparable from the field of differential relations that constitute it” (215). The relations that make up the veneration of the handfish as a Tasmanian icon are constituted by a long history of touch, from the aquacultural expansion of scallop fishing in the Derwent Estuary that destroyed their habitats, to the pollution of the south-eastern lutruwita/Tasmanian waters, and present local conservation efforts. Current research to recover and protect Tasmanian handfish species have resulted in both the figurative and literal touching of hands. The hands of divers, scientists, handfish, human and nonhuman, touch as part of the efforts to study the handfish. Field-work is full of touching:

As a permitting requirement during this study we moved from capture of fish by hand, which allows for more precise measurements for length frequency analysis, to *in situ* measurement in order to reduce stress to the animals. (Lynch et al. 14, italics original)

Changing the way Lynch and his co-authors measured the individual fish led them to observe and interpret that the Spotted Handfish prefer to hide their hands under the sand: “fish were usually partially hidden by some form of cover and with their colourful hands, dorsal and tail fins retracted, which reduces their profile for better camouflage” (Lynch et al. 14). In their encounters with humans underwater, handfish keep their hands to themselves.

What does it mean to be *in touch* with the handfish and other species that are close to extinction because of Anthropocenic dominance and destruction? What does the handfish have to tell us about interspecies entanglement and the complex patternings of more-than-human relationality? And how are these encounters mediated by the underwater environment? It is not immediately clear from Lynch and his co-author’s descriptions why and how the handfish communicate stress when touched by the hands of divers. What does become clear is that touching the handfish means that the handfish touches us too. The human diver or scientist is familiar with being in and underwater and uses the water as the connection between their world

and ours. But the act of touching is not necessarily consensual from a handfish perspective. Would the handfish ever want to touch the human? When our hands touch theirs, remove their hands from the underwater environments they have called home for hundreds, possibly thousands of years, the threat of human touch for handfish survival resurfaces. The water that binds handfish to human touch carries these climate and colonial encounters.



Fig. 10. **Touching the handfish.** Measurement of the spotted handfish by the method called 'handling'. Lynch, Tim, Lincoln Wong and Mark Green. "Direct Conservation Actions for the Critical Endangered Spotted Handfish: Final Report to the Threatened Species Commissioner." CSIRO Publishing, 2016, p. 14.

The main dangers to handfish survival are all in some way connected to human touch, or to be more specific, to the touch of Western colonisation and continued neo-liberal capitalism. They include climate change, invasive marine pests eating the kelp and ascidians that handfish depend on to lay their eggs (for instance by introduced species such as the Northern Pacific Seastar (*Asterias amurensis*)), pollution accidents, urban sedimentation, mortality as bycatch, swing moorings, coastal infrastructure, poaching and heavy metals (Lynch et al. 17). Barad describes the ethics of touching through Derrida's notion of hospitality and the need for openness to the infinitude of difference: "Ethicality entails hospitality to the stranger threaded through oneself and through all being and non/being" ("On Touching" 217). Opening up to the handfish invites the stranger within and emphasises the entanglement of underwater life. The handfish is always already touched by human hands, as it touches us through the ongoing histories of colonisation. The pollution of the river Derwent and the toxicity of this water that so many Tasmanians swim in every summer touches us and touches them. Their hands touching mine, touching theirs, encouraging water-hand-fin-entanglement.

In *Extinction Studies*, Rickard draws the handfish and, line by line, recreates the entanglement of touch that precedes and follows her work. During the drawing stage of the performance, most time is spent between Rickard, her research on the species, its image, the pencil and the paper, with the occasional conversation with visitors of the museum. After the last line is drawn, the time has come to erase and make way for another extinct species to appear, disappear and merge with the gathered traces of extinction that have collected. I attended several of the erasure events across the sixteen months of Rickard’s performance. The affective nature of this project — performing, embodying and showing how extinction and erasure are connected to touch — moved through the crowds that gathered to watch extinction happen in front of them. The entire crowd, including babies and toddlers, fell silent to watch Rickard’s hands move over the page and superimpose erasure with the weight and responsibility we carry to think of extinction as more than any singular event. These moments where affect becomes collective are part of what Australian feminist theorist Hannah Stark calls “extinction afterlives” (“Cultural Politics” 66). Diving deeper in the idea of extinction afterlives is helpful to further analyse how Rickard’s work shifts the idea that extinction is a singular event, to the ‘long durée’ and “dull edge” (van Dooren, *Flight Ways* 58) of colonial species extinction entanglement.



Figure 11. **The hands of the handfish.** Detail of the pectoral fins of the Smooth Handfish touching the hindwing of the Xerces Blue butterfly and the neck of the Schomburgk’s Deer. Rickard, Lucienne. *Extinction Studies*, Durational performance: Graphite on paper, 2x1.5m, Exhibited at: Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery (TMAG), Hobart, Tasmania, Australia, 9 December 2020. Photo author.

Extinction Afterlives and their Underwater Colonial Entanglement

What is lost when a species, an evolutionary lineage, a way of life, passes from the world?
What does this loss mean within the particular multispecies community in which it occurs: a
community of humans and nonhumans, of the living and the dead?

— Thom van Dooren, *Flight Ways: Life and Loss at the End of Extinction*

Two rooms away from Rickard's *Extinction Studies* performance at the TMAG, the permanent exhibition "The Thylacine: Skinned, Stuffed, Pickled and Persecuted" shows the bones, skins and some of the last known moving images of the Thylacine. The juxtaposition of these two exhibitions draws out the relationship between extinction, loss, mourning and the act of erasure. The Thylacine is an extinct carnivorous marsupial, the last of which, called 'Benjamin', died in 1936 in the Beaumaris Zoological Gardens in nipaluna/Hobart, lutruwita/Tasmania (Stark, "Cultural Politics of Mourning"). They were once common in New Guinea and widespread on the Australian mainland but disappeared there at least two thousand years ago. In recent times the Thylacine was only known to be widespread in lutruwita/Tasmania, hence its common name of 'Tasmanian tiger'. It fed on kangaroos and wallabies until extensive persecution by white settlers led to their extinction (Burbridge and Woinarski 2016).

The 'extinction afterlives' and remnants of the Thylacine are on display when "after death, they enter a museum collection" (Stark, "Cultural Politics of Mourning" 66). These "uncanny" Thylacine remains, Stark notes, have "something to teach us about how extinction happens and [...] reveal complex and interlocking stories about empire, the relationships between collectors, museums and zoos, the public desire to look at animals on display, and the individual lives, death and afterlives of particular animals" (77). The permanent Thylacine exhibit performs what can be called the *longue durée* of their erasure. It shows how loss of a single species as the result of anthropogenic extinction events is part of the long and enduring history of settler colonialism, capitalism and Western notions of human exceptionalism. As Thom van Dooren argues in *Flight Ways* (2014), humans are "implicated in the lives of disappearing others" (5) as individuals, as communities and as a species. This 'dull edge' of extinction represents the "prolonged and ongoing *process* of change and loss that occurs across multiple registers and in multiple forms long before and well after [a] 'final' death" (58, *italics original*). Human-nonhuman extinction entanglements need to be taken seriously in order to account for the extrapolation of the notions of scale and time that are at stake at the edge of extinction. The 'dullness' of extinction is the result of the "slow unraveling [...] of complex

ways of life” (58). Extinction does not just happen when the last ‘specimen’ of a species dies. As Stark and van Dooren show in their work on the afterlives and edges of extinction, extinction is a long event of unwinding patterns of multispecies relationships:

To allow the term ‘extinction’ to stand for only the death of the last of a kind is to think with an impoverished notion of ‘species’, a notion that reduces species to specimens, reified representatives of a type in a museum of life, and in so doing ignores the entangled relations that *are* a particular form of life. (van Dooren, *Flight Ways* 58)

The slow unravelling of the world of the handfish is part of the long event of south-eastern lutruwita/Tasmanian coastal transformation, the disappearance of kelp environments and the changing nature of global underwater life.

Presented juxtaposed with TMAG’s permanent Thylacine exhibition, Rickard’s *Extinction Studies* offers an alternative understanding of extinction events of the twentieth and twenty-first century. In Rickard’s drawings, the act of erasing and the durational character of the project draw on important issues at stake in contemporary debates on the scale and time of what has become known as the ‘sixth’ or the ‘Anthropocene mass extinction event’ that has seen a large increase in extinction rates (Ripple et al. 2017). Growing awareness of the effects of anthropogenic planetary change mean that hierarchical dualistic ideas such as human/nonhuman, nature/culture, so long at the core of Western thought, have slowly become unsettled. Positioning the human at the top of the species-iceberg has obscured our ability to observe the devastating losses that have already occurred and are ongoing (van Dooren 18). As Timothy Clark notes in *Ecocriticism on the Edge* (2015): “the Anthropocene enacts the demand to think of human life at much broader scales of space and time, something which alters significantly the way that many once familiar issues appear” (13). The times and scales of extinction are broadened when species are no longer viewed in isolation but in touch with each other. This enables us to think of extinction as both ‘long’ and ‘fast-paced’: at once a ‘deep’ and ‘shallow’ process of layered multispecies change.

The TMAG Thylacine exhibit shows the same remains, day in, day out, in their own room separate from other long-term exhibitions that showcase Tasmania’s “unique geological history and [...] unusual complement of plants and animals” (Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery). Down the hall, Rickard’s drawings and erasures build up over time. The process of inscription and erasure on the same piece of paper emphasises both the fast-paced nature of

contemporary mass extinction events, as well as the cumulative loss and building of grief that is invoked by gathering species that can no longer be ‘saved’. *Extinction Studies*’ cumulative nature moves away from the usual tracking of extinction via the loss and endangerment of single species, which Heather Swanson and her co-authors (2017) argue is not the best way to ‘see extinction’:

We often tally the plants and animals at risk of extinction one by one on lists of endangered species. But single species are not the best units through which to see extinction—because they are not the units of life. (Swanson et al. 141)

Life is made up of more complex patterns than these linear extinction lists suggest. Species loss does not just refer to the disappearance of a group of individual lives; it illustrates the loss of multispecies worlds. In *Extinction Studies*, Rickard rewrites the Red List and reframes the end of the world not as an apocalyptic event to come, but as a process set in motion long ago, from at least when Péron scooped the Smooth Handfish out of Tasmanian waters and took it to France. The colonial extinction afterlives of the handfish as the very first bony marine fish to be officially declared extinct, show that our perceptions of extinction have finally, too, reached the ocean. Rose notes that “[r]ates of extinction are perhaps ten thousand times the background rate; as ecologist Steven Harding says, we are hemorrhaging species [...] numbers are a proxy to which it is worth paying attention. However, what is actually occurring is more dire than the numbers indicate” (“Shimmer” 52). Reiterating Donna Haraway’s words that “[i]t matters what stories make worlds, what worlds make stories” (*Staying* 12), when we look beyond the numbers, we can begin to see that “as things start to slip down that death road, other things start going too” (Rose, “Shimmer” 52).

The ocean has been a site of species loss for over two centuries. As a species that only visits underwater environments, it has been difficult for humans to assess the magnitude of marine bio- and ecodiversity loss. The grief, therefore, that follows the stories of terrestrial creatures such as the last Dodo (*Raphus cucullatus*) or Passenger Pigeon (*Ectopistes migratorius*) has never, until recently, extended to the life that no longer lives underwater. When the Smooth Handfish disappeared in front of a human crowd at TMAG in December 2020, the audience was visibly and audibly affected. Witnessing the appearance and disappearance of species is confronting for a variety of reasons. From the perspective of the affect of grief and mourning, it offers a way into an alternative space and time of “acknowledgement and respect for the dead” (van Dooren, *Flight Ways* 126). Underwater and

beyond the eyes of the everyday human, however, who else is mourning the death of the handfish? What is grief like underwater, and how far does it extend?

In a world full of Western human exceptionalism, respect for the dead is complicated. Deaths of animals and plants do not tend to offer the same impact to human viewers as the deaths of those who belong to our own species. The logic of human exceptionalism as well as capitalist progress narratives prevent the flourishing of mourning for nonhuman species even when lost as a result of anthropogenic environmental impact. In short, nonhuman life is often regarded as ‘worth less’ than human life. Yet as van Dooren notes in his discussion of the mourning and grief of the Hawaiian Crow (*Corvus hawaiiensis*): “the ability to live in a way that references and interacts with the dead is not uniquely human as such, but rather is a way of life that we are increasingly denying to a host of other animals” (133). Animals mourn and grieve, and the layered nature of *Extinction Studies* pays homage to the impact extinction has beyond the human. The extinction of nonhuman life has repercussions for the lives and deaths of other nonhuman life. Biodiversity loss and ecosystem degradation cast a wide net. The remnants on the page of the extinct species that Rickard draws not only haunt the humans that view her work, they haunt and mourn each other as well.

The aesthetic nature of drawing and erasing extinction in *Extinction Studies* reveals the complex implications of grief and care in relation to the human-centric and colonial space of the museum. Rickard’s drawings are intricate and show her dedication and care for the stories of the species she draws. Because conversations with the public are part of her performance, and the drawings became increasingly complex, it took days, weeks, eventually months to finish drawing and erasing the image of each species. The long durée of extinction becomes mirrored in Rickard’s project of endurance. Loss and grief superimpose to carry the dull and slow unravelling of lives. The performance of *Extinction Studies* includes the (dis)appearance of extinct species on paper as well as in conversation with a witnessing public. The public grieves over the loss of these species, triggered by the beauty and technical skill evident in Rickard’s drawings: the Smooth Handfish took more than a month to draw before it disappeared in a matter of minutes.

Museums are historically colonial institutions that “drove the growth of European empires” and “emerged as active tools of empire” throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Giblin et al. 471). As museums have tended to produce only “narrow official histories” that included many instances of cultural erasure (5), a narrow idea of conservation and survival became enforced within Western museum discourse. In relation to the afterlives of the Thylacine, Stark notes that “it is through intensive breeding programs”, including an

attempt at resurrecting the Thylacine via a DNA sample of a female Thylacine pup held by the Australian Museum in Sydney (Specimen P762), “that humans can work to counteract, and therefore be redeemed from, their culpability in, anthropogenic species extinction’ (75). Several Tasmanian handfish species have become part of this process of resurrection and regeneration. *The Handfish Conservation Project* includes a captive breeding program for the Spotted Handfish in controlled tank environments. The handfish in this breeding program form a control population in case something unexpected happens to wild handfish populations, so they can be bred to release in the wild or increase existing populations. There are, however, no guarantees when it comes to the lab or the museum. The human-centric history of the museum passes on an idea of care and involvement with extinct species that tends to halt at a static notion of remembrance and conservation or celebrates just singular species. Museum have only recently begun to acknowledge their contested position and their responsibility as contributors to species extinction.⁵¹ *Extinction Studies* plays with these conventions to unsettle the magnitude of extinction on the level of single species. While efforts to save the handfish that still crawl the bottom of the south-eastern coast of lutruwita/Tasmania are underway, the process of extinction is always already a multispecies and material affair.

The survival of the handfish does not depend on its conservation alone. If more kelp disappears, the water temperature keeps increasing, and the river bedding continues to be used for invasive aquaculture or boat moorings, handfish will inevitably continue to be affected. Taking the handfish out of the water into the lab is ineffective in isolation. Handfish-kelp-water-salt-ocean are entangled in south-eastern lutruwita/Tasmania. *Extinction Studies* goes beyond an immobile idea of either recovery or erasure and performs the multi-vocal nature of Anthropocene mass extinction events. As the eraser shavings pile up on the floor underneath Rickard’s feet, they emulate the entanglement of underwater worlds and shift perspectives to show a different way to see extinction. As long as the giant kelp touches the handfish, it touches the seastar, touches our hands and touches the colonial extinction afterlives that have touched the coasts of lutruwita/Tasmania in climate colonial ways.

⁵¹ In their introduction to the edited collection *Climate Change and Museum Futures* (2015), Fiona Cameron and Brett Neilson write that “[t]he changing spatial and temporal configurations of globalization have positioned museums within unstable assemblages of communication, finance, data flows, and technological and scientific processes. As such their future is volatile, at once open to possibilities for experimentation and susceptible to political and social influences that can rigidify their practices and close off opportunities for exploring contentious issues. This is why museums are contested spaces when it comes to dealing with entrenched and genuinely confounding concerns such as climate change” (2).

Mandy Quadrio: The Fiction of Extinction

The work of palawa Tasmanian Aboriginal artist Mandy Quadrio rearticulates the problem of extinction in lutruwita/Tasmania and the legacy of misuse of the extinction myth to erase the survival of Tasmanian Aboriginal people. What happens to seeing extinction in lutruwita/Tasmania when these histories are foregrounded? Mandy Quadrio, whose ancestral countries are the tebrakunna/Coastal Plains Nation in the north-east of lutruwita/Tasmania and the Oyster Bay Nation of eastern lutruwita/Tasmania, uses a lot of materials in her work that are difficult to handle. The steel wool she uses is rough on the hands and rusts over time. The bull kelp is dense and leathery; it is tough but pliable when wet. Like the rusting of steel wool, kelp changes over time as it moves from one environment to the next. In her work, Quadrio connects materials from the lutruwita/Tasmanian environment, such as kelp and reeds, that transform by being reabsorbed into the ocean, to colonial materials like steel wool, that in its encounter with the ocean becomes abrasive. The tensions between hard and soft, pliable and abrasive, of Country and imported with settler colonialism, that emerge in Quadrio's work, put the narratives of extinction that have been perpetuated in relation to Tasmanian Aboriginal people on edge. Quadrio's work is part of a wider cultural resurgence, evident in the work of other contemporary Tasmanian Aboriginal artists, such as Trawlwoolway artist Julie Gough and Trawlwoolway Elder and artist Lola Greeno. By untangling the complex materiality of past and present in settler colonial Tasmania, I show how Quadrio's work upends the racial foundations of the Tasmanian Aboriginal extinction myth that is rooted in the genocidal Black War, and how she strengthens the importance of palawa Tasmanian Aboriginal sovereignty.

In Quadrio's bull kelp works *Sovereign Sensuality* (2016), *Hold Me While You Can — Endangered Species* (2020) and the *Here Lies Lies* (2019) installation in the Bond Store at TMAG, the fiction of extinction in relation to Tasmanian Aboriginal people becomes unsettled. How does the use of kelp disrupt the linear narrative of colonialism and extinction that was used against Tasmanian Aboriginal people? How can we reconsider the nature of erasure, so prominent in Lucienne Rickard's *Extinction Studies*, when foregrounding its use against the communities that have lived in lutruwita/Tasmania for tens of thousands of years before European invasion, up to the present? Looking at extinction theory from the environmental humanities alongside historical research and the work of Tasmanian Aboriginal researchers who address the problem and fiction of extinction in relation to Tasmanian Aboriginal people, I discuss how kelp environments connect land to sea, past to present and future, and render connections between colonialism and extinction more complex than typically thought.



Fig. 12. **Here lies lies at the entrance.** Quadrio, Mandy. *Here Lies Lies*. Installation. Bronze. Exhibited at: Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery (TMAG), nipaluna/Hobart, lutruwita/Tasmania, Australia, 15-23 November 2019. Mandy Quadrio. www.mandyquadrio.com.au/here-lies-lies/.



Fig. 13. **Traditional palawa Tasmanian Aboriginal canoe overlaid with steel wool.** Quadrio, Mandy. *Here Lies Lies*. Installation. Reeds and steel wool. Exhibited at: Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery (TMAG), nipaluna/Hobart, lutruwita/Tasmania, Australia, 15-23 November 2019. Mandy Quadrio. www.mandyquadrio.com.au/here-lies-lies/.

Unsettling Tasmanian Extinction Myths

When I attended the opening night of the 2019 ‘Hobiennale’ — a portmanteau to describe the biennial art, music and performance festival in nipaluna/Hobart, lutruwita/Tasmania — there was no overlooking Mandy Quadrio’s installation *Here Lies Lies* (2019). *Here Lies Lies* consist of five pieces, created by Quadrio specifically for the basement of the Bond Store Gallery: a Tasmanian Aboriginal canoe overlaid with steel wool (see Fig. 13), a pillar of soft steel wool (see Fig. 14), and three textual pieces that repeat the words “here lies lies” in bronze and resin in several places across the basement (see Fig. 12, 15 and 16), at the entrance, before the sandstone wall in the back of the room, and jumbled in a pile of letters. The space was dark, with only the individual pieces lit up. As Quadrio explains in conversation with Justine Youssef:

[b]y illuminating only the individual works, I was able to use this colonial space to shine a bright light on the lies and fictions of Tasmanian history. It also has the suggestions of a crime scene. The historical and contemporary crime scene is consolidated by the colonialist moment work at the final moment of the installation, which appears as a large tombstone. (Youssef)

At the entrance to the basement, twelve bronze letters on the ground stop the viewer in their tracks. The shining words, “here lies lies” (see Fig. 12) set the tone. The lies and crime scene Quadrio alludes to are the murder and forced removal of Aboriginal people in Tasmania since the early 1800s that led to the narrative of the so-called ‘extinction’ of Tasmanian Aboriginal people, a harmful and persistent story that has followed Tasmanian Aboriginal communities to the present day.

As Australian historian Rebe Taylor describes: “from the mid-19th century, when other south-eastern Australian colonies marked the passing of the last ‘full-blood’ Aborigines of their ‘tribes’, Truganini (*Trukanini/Trucanini*) was named the last of her ‘race’” (“Genocide, Extinction” 407). Persistent ideas about ‘full-blood’ Tasmanian Aboriginal people depended on the “now-obsolete ideas of race and blood: that humans could be classified into distinct racial types, and that the blood was the conveyor of those racial distinctions” (406). These convictions have resulted in both the erasure of contemporary Tasmanian Aboriginal

communities and, on a national level in Australia, still inspire harmful political discussions about ‘blood quota’ and contentious legal definitions that aim to define Aboriginality.⁵² These



Fig. 14. **Steel wool pillar of waves.** Quadrio, Mandy. *Here Lies Lies*. Installation. Steel wool. Exhibited at: Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery (TMAG), nipaluna/Hobart, lutruwita/Tasmania, Australia, 15-23 November 2019. Mandy Quadrio. www.mandyquadrio.com.au/here-lies-lies/.

discussions consist of thinly veiled arguments aimed to restrict rights via Western classification systems looking to define who does and who does not qualify as Aboriginal or Indigenous, without community consultation.

Arguing against the narrative of extinction of Tasmanian Aboriginal people is not to say that genocide did not take place. In the early decades of British colonisation, the so-called

⁵² In March 2019, the right extremist Australian One Nation party invoked the misinformed idea of ‘blood quota’ and eugenics-related theories. In their so-called “Aboriginal Rescue Plan”, they ask for DNA evidence to ‘prove’ at least twenty-five percent Aboriginal heritage in order to receive Aboriginal-specific Government support, in contradiction to the wishes of Indigenous communities for self-determination and sovereignty, as well as Article 33 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), which states that “Indigenous peoples have the right to determine their own identity or membership in accordance with their customs and traditions” (The United Nations General Assembly). In *Native DNA: Tribal Belonging and the False Promise of Genetic Science* (2013) Kim TallBear describes, from a North American context, how racial science has become revived in the twenty-first century lab and what its political consequences are for the continued fight for sovereignty of Indigenous people, communities, tribes and nations.

Black War and invocation of martial law between 1828 and 1830, allowed “soldiers to shoot, and settlers to capture, Aboriginal people” (Taylor 406). In the ‘Black Line’ that followed under notorious Lieutenant-Governor George Arthur in 1830, “over 2000 soldiers and settlers moved, pincer-like across the island’s settled districts aiming to capture Aborigines in [their] sweep” (406). Able-bodied colonisers formed a human chain that moved south to capture, displace and relocate all Aboriginal people they could find. Thousands of Aboriginal people died. Those who survived but failed to escape capture were forcibly moved and incarcerated in several settlements across the island region. About two hundred Aboriginal people were taken to Flinders Island, in the Bass Strait north of the lutruwita/Tasmanian main island. Only forty-seven people returned twelve years later in 1847 from the site that was named Wybalenna (“Black man’s houses” in the language of the Ben Lomond people), when they were moved to the old convict station at putalina/Oyster Cove on the south-east coast of lutruwita/Tasmania, that at that time was called Van Diemen’s Land (Taylor, *Unearthed* 140).⁵³ The then and now famous Nuennone woman Truganini (*Trukanini/Trucanini*) was one of the people held captive at the Oyster Cove station. Her life came to exemplify the horrendous treatment Aboriginal Tasmanians endured because of the expanding white settlement on the island.

As *trawlwulwuy* woman Emma Lee writes together with her *tebrakunna* country, the reasons for a “systematic campaign of wholesale extermination of our peoples [...] are myriad and mundane, such as land grabs, however their task to remove all trace of us left behind legacies of extinction upon the death of our countrywoman Trucanini in 1876” (*tebrakunna* country and Lee 415). Truganini (*Trukanini/Trucanini*) accompanied Government Conciliator George August Robinson earlier in her life and had become increasingly well-known as the ‘last Tasmanian Aboriginal woman’. Through these persistent narratives, ideas concerning extinction and the murder and deaths of thousands of Tasmanian Aboriginal people became conflated. These stories silenced and erased “the parallel and continuing story of the women living on the islands of Bass Strait and on Kangaroo Island” (Taylor, *Unearthed* 140), as well as the many contemporary descendants of Fanny Cochrane Smith, who was born on Flinders Island in 1831 or 1832 and was denied ‘full-blood’ status throughout her life. Taylor pointedly notes that “[i]t seems many Australians don’t want to recognise the Aboriginal Tasmanian survivors. They don’t want their neat narrative messed up. For them, Trukanini remains the

⁵³ On 24 November 1642, Dutch colonial explorer Abel Janszoon Tasman reached the west coast of what he named Van Diemen’s Land, after Antony van Diemen, Governor-General of the Dutch East Indies, until it in 1856, under rule of the British empire, became a self-governing colony with an elected parliament. The colony was then named Tasmania, after Abel Janszoon Tasman.

last *real*, the last really black, really tribal Aboriginal Tasmanian” (140, italics original). Taylor sees this racist and eugenicist interpretation of race reflected in government and tourist literature.

Trawlolway artist Julie Gough emphasises that the Tasmanian Aboriginal extinction myth started well before Truganini’s (*Trukanini/Trucanini*) death:

The public perception of and attention to Tasmanian Aboriginal people during the latter half of the 1800s was carefully directed at Trucanini, in Hobart. This woman was internationally seen as, and expected to act as, the last representative Tasmanian Aboriginal. Her life, well documented from 1830 until her death in 1876, brought her great attention and much isolation. (“Fibre Across Time” 18)

Quadrio’s work, in her *Here Lies Lies* installation and beyond, goes head-to-head with the remains of Tasmanian extinction narratives, in order to reclaim the spaces that perpetuated the erasure of Tasmanian Aboriginal people. Book such as James Bonwick’s 1870 *The Last of the Tasmanians* and Clive Turnbull’s 1948 *Black War: The Extermination of Tasmanian Aborigines* reiterated the idea of Truganini (*Trukanini/Trucanini*) as the last Tasmanian Aboriginal woman. The display of her remains between 1904 and 1947 at the Royal Society of Tasmania — in the building that now houses TMAG — further reinforced this harmful myth. The framing of her passing as a story of extinction kept the story that she had been the last Tasmanian Aboriginal person alive for decades to come.

After Truganini (*Trukanini/Trucanini*) died in 1876, she was initially buried at the Cascade Female Factory, but later exhumed. Her skeleton was put on display at the Royal Society of Tasmania, in the building that currently houses the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery. In an exhibition called “Truganini, The Last Tasmanian Aboriginal”, people could view her remains. Truganini (*Trukanini/Trucanini*) had been acutely aware of what could happen to her body after she died. Having lived through the aftermath of William Lanne’s

death,⁵⁴ Truganini (*Trukanini/Trucanini*) is said to have begged to “be buried in the ‘deepest part’ of D’Entrecasteaux Channel, south of Hobart” (Taylor, “Genocide, Extinction” 409). The sea, however, would not reunite with Truganini’s (*Trukanini/Trucanini*) body until her remains were returned to the Tasmanian Aboriginal community in 1976, when her ashes were scattered in the D’Entrecasteaux Channel. It was, moreover, not until 15 February 2021 that TMAG and the Royal Society of Tasmania formally apologised and took responsibility for their actions and role exhuming, collecting and exploiting Tasmanian Aboriginal remains and cultural artefacts.⁵⁵

The influence of the Tasmanian Aboriginal extinction myth reaches well beyond the Australian continent. In the mid-1940s, it inspired the concept of ‘genocide’, which in turn extended the myth of Tasmanian Aboriginal extinction. In “Genocide, Extinction and Aboriginal Self-determination in Tasmanian Historiography” (2013), Rebe Taylor explains that the “term genocide, meaning the killing of a people was coined in 1944 by Raphael Lemkin to define the crimes of the Holocaust. [...] Lemkin considered one of the clearest cases of historical genocide was the policies and actions in the 1820s and 1830s of the British in the colony of Tasmania” (405). Taylor notes that over time the myth of Tasmanian Aboriginal extinction and the classification of genocide had become blurred and become synonymous at a time when Australia, as a nation, was trying to come to terms with its past: “Truganini and the history of Tasmania did indeed come to ‘stand’ [...] for all Australian colonial wrongs, an idea bolstered by a genuine belief that to mount the extinction of the Tasmanian Aborigines reflected a more evolved White Australia: a nation prepared to say ‘sorry’” (410). As *tebrakanna* country and Lee explain, these sentiments continued the erasure perpetrated by the colonial state: “I am a *trawlulwuy* woman from *tebrakunna* country, north-east Tasmania, Australia, and my history as an Aboriginal Tasmanian is characterised by my non-existence.

⁵⁴ When Tasmanian Aboriginal man William Lanne (also known as William Lanney, William Laney, or William Lanna, his Aboriginal name unfortunately no longer known) died in 1869, “local surgeons removed his head, hands, and feet” (Taylor, “Genocide, Extinction” 409). Lanne was a member of “the last free people captured in 1842” (Baird 16). Erroneously considered the ‘last full-blooded Aboriginal Tasmanian man’, Lanne’s mutilated remains were sent to museums and private collections in colonial nations across the world. William Crowther, who would become Premier of Tasmania, stole Lanne’s skull and replaced it with that of another man. Lanne’s hands and feet were later “found in the Royal Society rooms in Argyle Street, now TMAG, and a skull identified as Lanne’s was finally repatriated from Edinburgh in 1991 and buried by the Tasmanian Aboriginal community in the north west of the state” (Baird 16).

⁵⁵ For the apologies made on 15 February 2021, on behalf of the board of TMAG and the Royal Society of Tasmania, see: www.tmag.tas.gov.au/about_us/apology_to_tasmanian_aboriginal_people, and rst.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/RST-2021-Apology-to-Tasmanian-Aboriginal-People-for-the-web.pdf.

[...] We became the unspeaking non-beings against a backdrop of colonising excess and greed” (415). By expressing remorse for a dark past but refusing to extend this wrongdoing to its continuity in the present, White Australia conflated genocide and extinction, and continued the erasure of Tasmanian Aboriginal existence well beyond the Black War and the Black Line of the 1820s and 30s. Lee describes what it was like growing up in the shadows of these extinction stories:

We survived in the margins as our women raised families, we built pocket communities and, where we could, we continued to practice our culture in the shadows. However, our survival has had to contend with these popular, and seemingly intractable, fallacies of extinction, where existence is no match against colonial mythology. (*tebrakunna* country and Lee 416)

It is in relation to this history and its present reverberations that Mandy Quadrio reclaims TMAG and the Bond Store. Her work critiques the institution that displayed Truganini’s (*Trukanini/Trucanini*) remains and kept her body from the sea and reasserts palawa Tasmanian Aboriginal survival. The need for work addressing the afterlives of the extinction myth was reiterated when I visited *Here Lies Lies* mid-November 2019. Not all people who encountered Quadrio’s installation were stopped in their tracks by the bronze words on the ground. Many stepped on the loose letters, scrambling *here lies lies* once again. And while some immediately noticed the effects of their inattention and rushed to move the letters back to their intended positions, others continued walking into the space, seemingly unaware of how their movements re-enacted the legacies and critique of erasure they were urged to witness.

The Bond Store is currently part of TMAG but was built between 1824 and 1826 as a four-level brick building used to store dry goods such as grain, with the basement likely used to store tobacco and spirits. This makes the Bond Store one of the oldest remaining buildings built in the early years of the British colonisation of Tasmania, following the first colonial settlement in 1803, fifteen years after the ‘first fleet’ colonised what is now called New South Wales (Taylor 406). By placing a Tasmanian Aboriginal canoe in this space, alongside the poignant statement that ‘here lies lies’, Quadrio works to “expose the historic and continued denial of the existence of palawa people” (Youssef). The ongoing myth of Tasmanian Aboriginal extinction becomes upended in Quadrio’s installation. She incorporates several Tasmanian watercrafts and emphasises the seafaring Tasmanian Aboriginal traditions through both the canoe in *Here Lies Lies* as well as her use of bull kelp in much of her other work. The



Fig. 15. **‘Here lies’, a memorial.** *Here Lies Lies*. Installation. Resin on sandstone. Exhibited at: Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery (TMAG), nipaluna/Hobart, lutruwita/Tasmania, Australia, 15-23 November 2019. *Mandy Quadrio*. www.mandyquadrio.com.au/here-lies-lies/.

sandstone memorial, accompanied by the words “here lies” (see Fig. 15), emphasises the commemorative nature of the installation. The stones that make up the basement of the Bond Store, were placed there at the same time as war was waged against Tasmanian Aboriginal Nations. “[W]hat bodies lie beneath the built environment” (Youssef), Quadrio asks. Her work reasserts the survival of Tasmanian Aboriginal communities, but also honours the ancestors lost in the past two hundred years, as well as the tens of thousands of years of history of what is considered one of the oldest living human cultures on Earth.⁵⁶

Breaking free of her, her country’s and her community’s status as “‘nameless’ and ‘placeless’ in our country” (416), in “‘Reset the Relationship’: Decolonising Government to Increase Indigenous Benefit”, Lee details the importance of the fisheries industry and building new relationships with the Tasmanian Government for “reclaiming our forms of decision making according to our cultural practices” (416). Quadrio, too, emphasises the sea-faring nature of palawa Tasmanian Aboriginal traditional and contemporary communities. The reeds and steel wool-covered canoe in *Here Lies Lies* (see Fig. 13) represent “Palawa cultural identity”

⁵⁶ See Griffiths, Billy and Russell, “What We Were Told: Responses to 65,000 Years of Aboriginal History”, *Aboriginal History: Volume forty-two 2018*, 2018, pp. 31-53, for an extended discussion of “public thinking about Aboriginal history and deep time” (47) and the enduring misinformation concerning ancient Australia and its Indigenous communities.

(Youssef) and show that despite attempts to hide Tasmanian Aboriginal culture by a cover of abrasive erasure, the canoe's shape asserts itself to reinforce its continued importance. The kelp pieces Quadrio creates further entangle her critique of the Tasmanian Aboriginal extinction myth with the ocean. Analysing the importance of kelp for Tasmanian Aboriginal cultural revival, moreover, shows the potentially far-reaching consequences of current kelp forest instability in the lutruwita/Tasmanian region. Connecting environmental humanities research on extinction to kelp, Quadrio's work underscores the importance of kelp forest survival.



Fig. 16. **Here lies lies, scrambled.** Quadrio, Mandy. *Here Lies Lies*. Installation. Resin. Exhibited at: Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery (TMAG), nipaluna/Hobart, lutruwita/Tasmania, Australia, 15-23 November 2019. Mandy Quadrio. www.mandyquadrio.com.au/here-lies-lies/.

Carrying Water and Reimagining Extinction

There is an irony that as my ongoing Australian Indigenous culture is slowly being recognised for its resilience, the bull kelp forests of north-east Tasmania are facing extinction due to dramatic sea temperature increases.

— Mandy Quadrio, *Hold Me While You Can* — *Endangered Species*

In her work on death and extinction, Deborah Bird Rose discusses what she calls ‘double death’: “the process that is driving the great unmaking of life in this era known as the Anthropocene”

(“Multispecies Knots” 128). While death is integral to life on Earth, in the time we increasingly call the Anthropocene, death has become amplified. Disjointed from the immanence of death that is necessary to life, Rose’s notion of ‘double death’ is related to the nonlinearity of death in the Anthropocene. Death and life are no longer necessarily entwined. Death follows death, unable to continue the process of renewal as ecosystems are “unable to recuperate their diversity. The death of resilience and renewal, at least for a while” (Rose, “Double Death”). In *Wild Dog Dreaming* (2011), Rose describes how dingoes were killed by the agricultural 1080 poison (sodium fluoroacetate) that was meant to kill ‘invasive species’ in Australia, but kills dingoes and others along the way, with their bodies continuing to poison others in their death, and beyond. The death that follows death moves through colonised Australia: as Rose writes in *Reports from a Wild Country*, “[w]e cannot avoid the knowledge that conquest requires death and dispossession” (4). The coloniality that underlies these double deaths is particularly visible on the Australian continent.

The arrival of European colonisers was a direct cause of Aboriginal deaths, and a death drive that, moreover, extended to nonhuman animal and plant life on the continent and the seas that surround it. The devastation caused by colonisation is visible in the increasingly unstable bushfire seasons, and loss of biodiversity on the land, in the sky and in the water. The deaths that are happening on large scales underwater in lutruwita/Tasmania — the kelp that is eaten by invasive sea urchins and the handfish that are unable to thrive in the increasingly barren coast waters — are entangled with this longer *durée* of double deaths, bearing the scars of the British colonisation of the region. The impacts of these deaths not only matter for the life that is to come, they also cause the past to become undone. Time and scale converge in these Anthropocene death patterns. To acknowledge the Anthropocene problem of colonial-driven double death means to recognise the nonlinearity and “plurality of responsibilities in the present — both towards the past and the future” (Rose, *Reports* 176). The deaths of species in the present matters to the life that came before, as well as the life that comes after. The amplification of death in the present is a problem of the future, the present and the past.

The bull kelp that Mandy Quadrio works with reinscribes the importance of following the ancestors in order to break away from the continuing process of colonialism-induced double death. Until recently, the double death of the ocean and marine life had gone largely undetected. In part spurred by the increased attention to the disappearance of Tasmanian handfish species, the problem of kelp forest loss has become visible on shore. In conversation with Justine Youssef, Quadrio says: “when I have been hunting and gathering with the aunties, I’ve noticed a decline in the bull kelp that inhabits the coastal shorelines” (Youssef). Scientists at the

Institute for Marine and Antarctic Studies (IMAS) in Hobart researching kelp forest stability and resilience indicate that 95% of Tasmanian kelp forests have disappeared or have been negatively affected. Layton and his co-authors attribute this loss to the combined threat caused by “anthropogenic stressors” that “include urbanisation, pollution and climate change” (Layton et al.). This confirms the disastrous impacts of colonialism on kelp forest survival. Tasmanian Aboriginal communities have only ever used small portions of kelp. The massive contemporary changes to kelp forest stability are not the result of ‘human interference’ as such but are caused by particular human actions: by the colonisation and Westernisation of the region and the pollution, urbanisation and environmental change this has incited.

Seen from the perspective of Tasmanian Aboriginal extinction myths and the continued fight of Tasmanian Aboriginal communities to sustain agency over the narratives of their survival, the disappearance and potential extinction of local kelp becomes increasingly complex. Kelp loss is important on the wider scale of global climate change and environmental change set in motion by colonialism. In Southern California, kelp forest regeneration is researched in relation to its potential to store CO₂ and possibly decrease ocean acidification and slow erosion.⁵⁷ Moreover, in lutruwita/Tasmania, preventing further kelp forest loss has particular local urgency. As part of what from Aboriginal thought translates as Country, kelp forests are connected, or rather, an intricate part of life in this island region that has been affected by the death patterns caused by European colonisation and settlement. Rose writes:

Aboriginal thought impresses upon us consideration of the thought that to fail is to be doubly at fault: to fail the future is also to fail the past. Human beings, in this orientation towards life, are the footprints of the ancestors who died and who still nurture the country and their descendants. Failure works back into time, as well as forward. To kill chunks of species and connectivities that form the matrix known as country is to start a process that works to erode the traces of the life that preceded us. (Rose, *Reports* 175)

The survival of bull kelp matters to the preservation, revival, and continuation of Tasmanian Aboriginal cultural practices. Quadrio’s contemporary kelp works reflect the long history of

⁵⁷ See Laura Rogers-Bennett and Cynthia A. Catton, “Marine Heat Wave and Multiple Stressors Tip Bull Kelp Forest to Sea Urchin Barrens” *Scientific Reports*, vol. 9, no. 1, 2019, pp. 1–9, for discussions of stressors to kelp forest in the United States.

bull kelp water carriers in Tasmanian Aboriginal culture as vessels to hold water and drink from.



Fig. 17. **Hold me while you can.** Mandy Quadrio. *Hold me while you can — Endangered species.* Bull kelp, river reed, ti tree, 2020. Mandy Quadrio. www.mandyquadrio.com.au/here-lies-lies/.

The bull kelp vessel Quadrio made for *The Climate Foundation* (see Fig. 17), a project that promotes “the rejuvenation of a thriving marine environment, including bull kelp ecosystems and permaculture projects to regenerate life in the oceans” (Quadrio, *Hold Me While You Can*), carries the name *Hold Me While You Can — Endangered Species* (2020). It is both a direct reference to the traditional water carriers and a continuation of this tradition, but with attention to the potential impact of kelp forest loss. The kelp vessel Quadrio made is from the same tradition as the oldest known surviving kelp water carrier (see Fig. 18), whose maker is unknown but likely came from the putalina/Oyster Cove settlement, south of nipaluna/Hobart. Here, commandant Joseph Milligan commissioned the water carrier for the 1851 Great Exhibition in the Crystal Palace in London, England, after which it was donated to the British Museum, where it still held today. In 2012, the short film *Tomalah* shows Gough visiting the Tasmanian Aboriginal cultural objects held in the British Museum’s storage facility. She writes:

For one segment, I filmed myself unwrapping the oldest known Tasmanian Aboriginal kelp water carrier. [...] Recently in Tasmania I filmed and sound-recorded the kelp beds at low tide moving rhythmically at the southern end of Adventure Bay, Bruny Island. These kelp beds could well be the exact location where the kelp was collected to make the 1851 kelp carrier. [...] I am linking the historic, lost overseas cultural object with the place it likely originated from, and the sounds of its long-lost homeland. (Gough, “Tense Past” 63)

The recording of Gough handling the more than 170-year-old kelp carrier, interspersed with shots of contemporary lutruwita/Tasmanian bull kelp environments, demonstrates how important the continued survival of kelp environments is for the revival and continuation of Tasmanian Aboriginal traditions. In *Hold Me While You Can — Endangered Species*, Quadrio extends her earlier work that addresses the survival of Tasmanian Aboriginal people and fallacy of the extinction myth to ask who will speak up for the kelp: “are we taking sufficient and



Fig. 18. **Traditional Tasmanian Aboriginal bull kelp water vessel.** Unknown maker, donor Joseph Milligan 1851. *Pitcher of the Aborigines of VD Land*. Model water vessel made of seaweed (kelp), 5 x 2.5 inches, Great Exhibition London #234, British Museum, OC 1851, 1122.2.

appropriate actions to protect species that cannot speak for themselves?” (*Hold Me While You Can*).

Thom van Dooren understands species as “flight ways” (27) that embody particular “*way[s] of life*, a particular set of morphological and behavioral characteristics that are passed between generations” (27, italics original). This evolutionary understanding of species, and the extinctions that have followed them, offers a way to interpret the implications of losing species to this “ongoing intergenerational process of *becoming*—of adaptation and transformation—in which individual organisms are not so much ‘members’ of a class or a kind, but ‘participants’ in an ongoing and evolving way of life” (27, italics original). The loss of kelp means the loss of underwater forests that house a multitude of life and extends underwater worlds to the shore. The kelp water carriers entwine past and present, water and land. Quadrio’s kelp work emphasises the carrying and gathering materiality of these objects. Kelp is a gathering material, foundational to the structure of kelp forests. Cayne Layton and his co-authors call kelp a “habitat-forming species”, or, in the industrialist language of the natural sciences: “‘ecosystem engineers’” (2). Emphasising the gathering nature instead of the machinic, Quadrio and other Tasmanian Aboriginal artists, such as Vera Nichols, who work with traditional fibres, emphasise kelp baskets’ gathering and storytelling nature:

The baskets are not empty. They are full of makers, their stories, their thoughts while making. The baskets are never empty. All of the thoughts jump out of the baskets onto all of us.” (Nichols in Gorringe et al. iii)

The gathering of stories in baskets is reminiscent of the ancient stories that inspired Ursula Le Guin’s ‘carrier bag theory’.⁵⁸ The gathered materials gather stories, gather Aboriginal resurgence and gather multispecies worlds in place across time.

Tasmanian Aboriginal women made fibre baskets out of kelp and several other plant fibres for a variety of reasons: “[t]hey were strung around the neck and taken underwater to gather sea resources or carried on land while gathering or transporting goods. A basket’s tenacity mirrored that of its makers. Diving underwater, climbing trees for possum or hunting seal, Aboriginal women made baskets for many purposes” (Gough, “Fibre Across Time” 3). The resilience and tenacity of the fibres they used are echoed in these baskets and their enduring legacies.

⁵⁸ See chapter three, “Storytelling as Anticolonial Method”, for further analysis of Ursula Le Guin’s ‘carrier bag theory’ and its implications for telling and listening to ethical stories with concern for the world.

In Quadrio's exhibition *Speaking Beyond the Vitrine* that showed at the Metro Arts Gallery in Brisbane between 11 and 28 July 2018, several vulval pieces reiterate the vitality of Tasmanian Aboriginal kelp resurgence and the ever-changing nature of contemporary Tasmanian Aboriginal culture. Via the kelp and bleached black velvet vulva that carries the title *Sovereign Sensuality* (see Fig. 19), Quadrio speaks to the gendered histories that connect kelp traditions with the racialized use of the 'black velvet' description colonisers used to refer to Aboriginal women. Emma Lee points out that while "the sea is a powerful connector to women's business and power [...] our women have also been particularly brutalised under intersections of 'colonialism, racism and sexism', notably for colonial abusers stealing women as labourers for a fledgling sealing industry" (*tebrakunna* country and Lee 424).

The hypersexualisation and sexual violence committed against Aboriginal women by English colonisers is represented in the layered velvet and kelp vulvas. Tasmanian Aboriginal women survived the genocide of their people and culture in several ways and the sea was important to their survival: "it was Aboriginal Tasmanian women who first interrogated the colonial French sailors in 1802 as to their intentions and purpose of their visit" (*tebrakunna* country and Lee 424).⁵⁹ As Jada Benn Torres argues:

[D]iscourses of extinction often do little to disentangle genocide from other common historical occurrences, such as alliances between indigenous peoples and colonizers, early and frequent partnerships between colonizers and indigenous women, regrouping of defeated indigenous groups, marronage, and the incorporation of indigenous peoples into colonial society. (Benn Torres 26)

By juxtaposing the whitened material that was used to denigrate Aboriginal women with the enduring shine of the bull kelp, Quadrio reasserts Tasmanian Aboriginal women's agency. The representation of colonial materials is brittle and stands in stark contrast to the sovereign sensuality that radiates from the vitality of the kelp. In *Speaking Beyond the Vitrine*, Quadrio returns the story to the women whose voices were silenced for a long time as the Tasmanian Aboriginal extinction myth reigned. Representing her culture on her own terms, Quadrio's kelp

⁵⁹ See Patsy Cameron's *Grease and Ochre. The Blending of Two Cultures at the Colonial Sea Frontier* (2011) for what she calls the "threshold where two cultures blend": the islands in the Eastern Bass Strait where some European men and Tasmanian Aboriginal women built lives together on the fringes of the colonial government.

work redefines the discourse on extinction in lutruwita/Tasmania, not as a narrative of decline, but as one of resurgence and continuation.



Fig. 19. **Kelp vitality and brittle coloniality.** Mandy Quadrio, *Sovereign Sensuality*, velvet, bull kelp, 2017. *Art Guide*. artguide.com.au/mandy-quadrio-is-speaking-beyond-the-vitrine/.

Conclusion

In Tasmania, women are of the sea, men are of the land and all are of the night sky. Women shaped the colonial movement on Tasmanian shores through our governance right to the things that come from the sea [...] Women have dived, hunted and harvested marine foods and cared for sea country ceremonial and lifestyle resources for thousands of years.

— *tebrakunna* country and Emma Lee, “Reset the Relationship”

The extinction narratives that inform this chapter come from the same region in lutruwita/Tasmania. They have similar origins in the history of colonialism and invasive settlement by the British, and both include distinct elements of erasure. In Rickard’s *Extinction Studies*, the colonial afterlives of species lost in recent times are layered in their erasure on the page. The disappearance of the Smooth Handfish from the environments it belonged to continues in the struggle for survival of other handfish species as well as the kelp forests they inhabit. The kelp encounters that happen on the lutruwita/Tasmanian coasts represent a local threshold of extinction. Kelp is under threat from global climate pressures, induced by colonial activities over the last several centuries, and the many lives that rely on these underwater forest habitats are feeling the consequences.

None of these extinction narratives exist in isolation. They are entangled and inseparable from the extinction stories that have been told about Tasmanian Aboriginal people, regardless of their continued survival and cultural resurgence. Kelp entangles past, present, future, sea and shore. The unique palawa Tasmanian Aboriginal women’s fibre art traditions have continued despite the long-lasting attempts of cultural erasure from colonial institutions that include the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery. As Mandy Quadrio’s evocative kelp work shows, recreating traditional baskets, kelp carriers and other contemporary versions of traditional crafts changes how we can see extinction in the region. The importance of kelp survival is strengthened by the connections between land and sea, where the touching of kelp, between human and nonhuman, life above and under water, always already takes place.

In the next chapter, “The Waves, the Ocean”, the canoe returns in a different form. Seafaring in twentieth and twenty-first century Australia has become a militarised exercise of border security and narratives of erasure. Behrouz Boochani’s *No Friend but the Mountain* unsettles the paradox of boat migration and border control in Australia. The imagined border stability of Australian territorial waters was born of Western colonisation: invasion and migration across the seas. Boochani’s text calls the erasure of contemporary oceanic border

crossings to account, foregrounding the connections between boats, borders, the bodies of refugees and the insular Australian national imaginary. Like Rickard's and Quadrio's upending of extinction stories and myths, the erasure that is emphasised in Boochani's work starts on Australian shores but soon travels over- and underwater.

6. The Waves, the Ocean: Borders, Boats and Refugee Bodies in Behrouz Boochani's *No Friend but the Mountains*

And the waves ... how horrifying they are ... how beautiful they seem.

— Behrouz Boochani, *No Friend but the Mountains*

Seeing images of hundreds of Black and brown people packed on small overcrowded or sinking boats has become commonplace in the contemporary Western media landscape. Seeking refuge in Europe, people try to reach Lampedusa from the Libyan and Tunisian coast, and Syrian refugees are seen crossing the Mediterranean from Turkish beaches. There have been recent sizable migrations of refugees in other parts of the world too, between Venezuela and southern Caribbean nations such as Aruba, between Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, and Australia, for instance — but their portrayal in media and politics has often been paradoxical. In this chapter I discuss how in the story of one such journey and its cultural and political reception the ocean becomes much more than space to traverse. Offering an alternative perspective on oceanic survival to the work discussed in previous chapters, Behrouz Boochani's *No Friend but the Mountains* (2018) shows how the ocean upends connection and is harnessed as boundary space to exclude the unwanted 'other' in settler colonial Australia: the refugee. Analysing this text, I critique oceanic imaginaries that rendered the ocean empty, *aqua nullius*, or a controllable border to keep the unwanted 'other' out. When in *No Friend but the Mountains* people cross bodies of water to seek refuge on foreign shores, what, who and how do we see?

Photographs of the lifeless body of three-year old Kurdish-Syrian boy Alan Kurdi, who tragically drowned along with his five-year old brother Ghalib while crossing the Mediterranean and washed ashore outside of Bodrum, Turkey, in September 2015, instantly became a symbol for the many innocent lives lost at sea since the start of the Syrian Civil War in 2011. The photos of Alan Kurdi travelled the world and came to define an ongoing war that stretched beyond the imaginary confines of the Arabic desert. Within minutes and hours they travelled across digital media and triggered a shift in the so-called 'European refugee crisis'. They caused world-wide outrage and reminded government leaders of their responsibilities toward people seeking refuge. The public response to the photographs concerning the plight of

those fleeing the Syrian Civil War and violence related to the Islamic State “shows the ability of images to invoke emotions” (Adler-Nissen et al. 76). Yet, as has since been articulated, the connections between these emotions and foreign policies “is neither straightforward nor permanent” (76). In “Images, Emotions, and International Politics: the Death of Alan Kurdi” (2020), Adler-Nissen and co-authors unpack the performativity of the image in relation to (for instance) gendered ideas around ‘fathers’ and ‘parents’, as well as the iconography of the ‘innocent child’. While the photographs of Alan Kurdi instantly became iconic and a symbol for the many innocent lives lost at sea since the start of the Syrian Civil War in 2011, they soon started to perform a narrative centred on exclusion.

While on the one hand the photographs and stories led to the opening of borders to Syrian refugees by Germany in September 2015, on the other hand they instigated a controversial agreement between the EU and Turkey in March 2016 that effectively closed European borders to Syrian refugees, with the Turkish Prime Minister Davutoğlu noting that their priority “was to stop the baby Aylans from washing up on the shores” (Adler-Nissen 92-93). In response to a surge in attention to the fate of refugees, the statement by Turkish PM Davutoğlu appealed to sentiments shared in the public sphere that reframed the death of children into the need for efforts to stop people from traversing the Mediterranean in the first place. ‘Saving’ a generalised group of “baby Aylans” became a call to stop people from seeking asylum across water borders. This shifted the responsibility and level of blame from the politics of war and the marginalisation and genocide of ethnic groups such as the Kurds to both the individual refugee and to ‘refugees’ as a homogeneous group. By reframing the crossing of water borders by refugees as endangering the lives of innocent children, populist politicians across Europe seized the opportunity to further vilify the refugee ‘other’.

The alarming idea that refugees endanger the lives of children, however, did not start in 2015 with the images of Alan Kurdi. Fourteen years earlier and many bodies of water away, in the Australia-Pacific region, a similar political rhetoric argued for the closing of borders to stop the death of refugee children. The appeal to save “baby Aylans” reiterated the “children overboard” affair that caused controversy in Australia in 2001 and sparked a new wave of anti-refugee sentiments in Australian politics. Just weeks after the September 11 attacks in the U.S. and leading up to a federal election in Australia that would be fuelled by anti-immigration sentiments and border politics, several senior government ministers of the Australian Liberal Howard government, including Prime Minister Howard, repeated the fabricated and then exaggerated story that Iraqi asylum seekers had thrown their children overboard when they saw an Australian naval vessel approach their boat mid-ocean crossing toward Australia, in order

to gain asylum. While proven unfactual, these events led to the further demonisation of asylum seekers trying to reach Australian territory by crossing the Indian Ocean, Timor Sea and the Coral Sea on the edges of the South Pacific. The connection between borders, boats and the bodies of refugees crossing these waters, and their detention — sometimes indefinitely — in Pacific ‘offshore detention facilities’ lies at the heart of this chapter.

An outspoken critic of the Australian offshore detention system as well as the visualisation and spectacle of violence in both government communication and the media is Kurdish-Iranian author, activist, journalist and former detainee of the Manus Island Regional Offshore Processing Centre, Behrouz Boochani. In response to the visual spectacle of border violence as it is broadcast in the Australia media, Boochani writes that:

all journalists, human rights defenders and politicians against offshore detention have unintentionally been in line with this policy and the government’s purposes as they are playing a critical role in advertising the violence and exporting it to the globe. As they discover and come to understand the violence in these two wheel cages, Manus and Nauru, they advertise it on a regular basis. The government, in this tremendous advertising and political game, discerns what type of violence to examine, to produce and to export. [...] Those of us stuck between are refugees, who remain bleak and defenceless, our lives exposed to the unconditional power of death in an indefinite form. (Boochani, “Australia”)

This chapter looks at oceanic border politics to consider how Australia’s oceanic borders have been represented in the first two decades of the twenty-first century. More specifically, it examines how Boochani’s fictocritical novel *No Friend but the Mountains* responds to the instability and (in)visibility of oceanic borders. In four sections, I argue that borders, boats and the bodies of refugees are tied up in a network or cartography of figurations (Braidotti *Nomadic Subjects*), a political repositioning, which questions the stability of the Australian border regime. By following theoretical and conceptual work from authors writing on migration and subjectivity, borders and national sovereignty, such as Gloria Anzaldúa and Judith Butler, as well as scholars whose work focuses on Australian border governance, I address the systems and narratives that underlie the imagination of Australian borders. The paradoxical relationship between the invisibility of offshore detention and the simultaneous hypervisibility of refugees in the twenty-first century Australian political debate encourages a system of exclusion and

deterrence that has recentered Australia and cast Oceania in its shadow. Boochani's text intervenes into what Perera and Pugliese have called "black sites": "object lessons in 'deterrence' [...] designed to showcase the punitive treatment meted out to boat arrivals" (86). How do oceanic narratives like Boochani's investigate the tension between oceanic border control and its relation to Australia's settler colonial past and present?

Writing is an Act of Resistance: Behrouz Boochani

For me, writing has always been an act of resistance. [...] I fight to write.

— Behrouz Boochani, "Writing is an Act of Resistance"

Born in Ilam in Kurdistan in western Iran in 1983, author, activist and journalist Behrouz Boochani grew up in a world in which the Kurdish people were oppressed and their sovereignty in Iran and surrounds was not recognised. Kurdistan is an "ambiguously defined and contested region" (Culcasi 682) that stretches across the borders of Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria. With a master's degree in political geography and geopolitics, Boochani was active in Iranian journalism and published in several Iranian newspapers (*Kaskobar*, *Weekly*, *Qanoon*, *Etemaad*). He founded the Kurdish magazine *Werya* and published and edited writing related to the protection of Kurdish minority rights and cultural freedom. When their offices were raided by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps of the Islamic Revolution in February 2013, eleven of his colleagues were arrested. Boochani was not in Ilam but in Teheran that day and avoided arrest. But after he published news about the raid and his colleagues' detention and the news gained global traction, his life in Iran was no longer safe:

After I published that news I did not go to work again. I went to a friend's house in the south of Tehran. At that time it was Nowrouz. I went to [the province of] Ilam, [to] my mother's house but I was scared all the time. I knew they were going to arrest me. (Boochani in Doherty)

He hid for months. After being told by friends and colleagues that they had been asked questions about him and his ideas, and certain he would be arrested, he had to flee. On 23 May 2013, Boochani left Iran and started travelling through Southeast Asia toward Australia: "I thought that Australia was free. I thought that in Australia I could write freely" (Boochani in Doherty).

He twice tried to cross the Timor Sea to the Australian external territory Christmas Island to appeal for asylum. These voyages inspired the oceanic crossing described in *No Friend but the Mountains*. The first time, the boat sank and Boochani was rescued only just in time from the cold ocean water by an Indonesian fishing boat. A fellow refugee drowned and did not make it back to the Indonesian shore. During the second voyage, Boochani's boat was picked up by a British cargo vessel that notified the Australian Navy. He arrived on Christmas Island, on Australian territory, on 23 July 2013, which coincided with his thirtieth birthday. But rather than freedom, Boochani and others were placed in detention on Christmas Island for a month and then transferred to the Manus Island Regional Processing Centre in August 2013. This 'processing centre' was one of several offshore Australian immigration detention facilities, based in Papua New Guinean (PNG) territory. These island detention centres further the Australian carceral logic that places the unwanted other outside of itself, outside of Australian territory.⁶⁰ The detention centre closed four years later, on 31 October 2017, after a PNG court ruled the detention facility unconstitutional, and the men who remained and survived these four years of physical and psychological torture, which resulted in several suicides and suicide attempts as well as murder, were forcibly transferred to one of the new prisons on the island. It was not until 14 November 2019, through extensive lobbying, that Boochani managed to obtain a one-month visa to speak at the WORD Christchurch literary festival in Christchurch, Aotearoa New Zealand. He currently remains in Aotearoa New Zealand. His claim for asylum and refugee status was formally recognised on 23 July 2020, the day he turned thirty-seven, exactly seven years after arriving in Australia. He was granted a one-year work visa and can now apply for permanent residency in Aotearoa New Zealand. Some of the other refugees detained in Australian offshore detention centres were granted asylum in the United States since the start of the Australian-U.S. agreement in 2016, though far fewer were accepted than initially promised, and many men remain on Manus Island. Despite pressure by the United Nations and global outrage, Australian policies excluding 'boat arrivals' remain in place.⁶¹

⁶⁰ Australian offshore immigration detention facilities, like the Manus Island Regional Processing Centre, furthermore, build on the existing imagination of the small tropical island as 'far away' and 'remote'. See Elizabeth DeLoughrey's extensive scholarship on island imaginaries for discussions of the ways the Western imagination has long fetishized the island as a remote and far away tropical place, the result of European colonisation of Caribbean and Pacific regions.

⁶¹ As of 30 April 2021, the latest update at time of writing (May 2021), the United States resettlement arrangement has accepted 418 refugees held in Papua New Guinea (and 394 from Nauru and 128 from Australia) to resettle in the United States: www.homeaffairs.gov.au/about-us/what-we-do/border-protection/regional-processing-and-resettlement.

In detention in Manus Prison, as Boochani prefers to call it, he became a spokesperson for the men in his compound and published on their plight in large Australian and international publications such as *The Guardian*, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, *HuffPost* and *Financial Times*. He published several poems online and filmed *Chauka, Please Tell Us the Time* (2018) from within Manus Prison on his mobile phone. In 2018, *No Friend but the Mountains: Writing from Manus Prison* was published by Picador Australia. Written in fragments and sent via WhatsApp and voice message to translator and philosopher at the University of Sydney Omid Tofighian, *No Friend but the Mountains* received several Australian and international literary prizes. Together, the articles, poems and novel Boochani published from within Manus Prison offer a perspective on Australia's border policies and its offshore detention system that were long kept invisible and censored by the Australian government. They, moreover, present a different way of approaching distinctions between borders on land and sea or oceanic borders, and between boats and the bodies they carry across.

While previous chapters have spoken about the ocean, the sea and other large bodies of water with positive connotations, framing the ocean as a site of connection though productive imagines — the ocean as kin, as mother, as life, as a place of belonging — this chapter strikes a more sinister tone. What happens when the ocean is harnessed as a site of danger and political exclusion? As a border, a wall, a dark space where death looms large? This chapter discusses Boochani's intervention into Australian oceanic border politics and the way his writing gave voice to refugees held in Australia's offshore island-based processing centres in the first two decades of this century. I approach *No Friend but the Mountains* as 'fictocriticism', a critical way of writing that interrogates agency and subjectivity through a mixture and border-crossing of forms. In Boochani's text, authorship, characterisation and the representation of dreams and the subconscious via poetry intertwine with a representation of the events that led to his incarceration on Manus Island. Boochani's rendering of oceanic environments, with the creation of the ocean as a central agent, defy the carceral logic of the Australian border detention system. It forms a critique of the externalisation of oceanic borders as 'other' than Australian, and beyond national control. By exploring the figure of the ocean, the boat, the border and the bodies of the refugees that connect them, I question power relations and stereotypical oceanic imaginings to argue that contemporary Australian border politics and treatment of refugees are a direct consequence of colonial imperial narrative and nationhood.

Borders, Boats and Bodies

What is a border? ... My whole life has been impacted by this concept of 'border'.

— Behrouz Boochani, *No Friend but the Mountains*

The distances refugees cross to reach Australian territory are much larger than those for people crossing the Mediterranean from the Turkish coast or the Channel between France and Southern England. These distances and the limitations of proximity to refugees have been exploited by the Australian government in its system of remote and indefinite 'offshore' detention. 'Boat-arrivals' — adults and children — are considered 'irregular' arrivals. The Migration Act 1958 justifies the protection and sovereignty of the Australian nation against asylum seekers arriving in an irregular way, legitimating their indefinite detention in remote locations. This means that large groups of asylum seekers, even after their claims to asylum have been assessed as justified, have been detained in offshore detention centres for years on end, often with little to no hope for future resettlement. In 2013, the Kevin Rudd Labour Government introduced a new version of Julia Gillard's 2012 'Pacific Solution', which included both the transfer of asylum seekers to Nauru and Manus Island in Papua New Guinea, but also resettlement in these Pacific Island nations or, alternatively, indefinite detention for those whose applications proved unsuccessful and who were unable to return to their countries of origin. Australia ignores its responsibilities under the 1951 Refugee Convention and the Protocol Relating to the status of Refugees, which it entered in 1967. Geographical distance, alongside remote detention, information bans and media blackouts have expanded the Australian border regime into what Claudia Tazreiter calls a "border of disappearance": one "constituted by the legal fiction of de-territorializing the Australian mainland and its island territories, such as Christmas Island, through legal excision, along with a suite of discursive, rhetorical and policy devices, the sum of which renders asylum seekers 'disappeared'" (Tazreiter). With the Pacific Solution I and II, and the 'Operation Sovereign Borders' that followed the late 2013 election of the Abbott Liberal-National Coalition Government, the Australian government aimed to 'solidify' its oceanic borders as a further deterrence to refugees arriving by boat.

Like most borders, Australian borders are not solid or simple lines in the water or sand. When it comes to oceanic borders, exactly how far from the coastline national borders are located has been a topic of constant international conflict. Oceanic borders are not visible in the water without maps and geolocation equipment. Yet borders play a vital role in the creation

of “discourses of states and nations” and “retain strong symbolic resonances bound up with the founding myths of the state” (Yuval-Davis 95). In the case of Australia, these founding myths and founding borders follow from a distinctly colonial narrative: a story of boat arrivals and territorialisation of space, and the creation of new boundaries after the continent was falsely declared *terra* or *aqua nullius*. It is important to keep in mind that many borders have come into existence not out of negotiation with the peoples whose lives are tied to these regions or their founding stories, but as the result of discussions between imperial powers, dividing and taking space without any consultation or approval. The irony of rendering boat immigration illegal, precisely in Australia, is not lost on those who study border politics. ‘Boat arrivals’ are fundamental to Australia’s foundational narratives.

In recent years, the desire for border security that stems from Australia’s colonial legacy has inspired increased naval presence in the oceans and seas that surround the landmass of the Australian continent. In the name of sovereignty and defence of national borders, this naval presence reinforces what Yuval-Davis explains is a border that becomes “a specific form, spatially bounded, of collectivity boundaries, dividing the world into ‘us’ and ‘them’, constructing permanent residence and citizenship in particular states as the determining signifier of membership of the nation in these political projects of belonging” (96). Australian borders are presented as powerful places to signify the sovereignty and might of the Australian nation as a stable entity in a region of flux. In the latter part of the 2010s, the implications of climate change increasingly became part of border security discussions. A 2018 Senate committee inquiry identified climate change as a “current and existential national security risk” (Commonwealth of Australia, “Implications of Climate Change” 9). In relation to ‘human mobility’, the ‘Implications of Climate Change for Australia’s National Security’ report responds to warnings that “climate change may contribute to mass migration” (24), here referring to a submission to the enquiry by the Department of Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade. Citing the Kaldor Centre for International Refugee Law, it notes that “the prospect of developed states such as Australia being inundated by people fleeing the impacts of climate change is a ‘flawed notion’ that will ‘result in ill-attuned and inappropriate policy responses’” (24). Yet news reports in the months that followed announced that the Australian Defence Force had circulated internal documents that warned of “a possible influx of climate refugees” and predicted that “the military may be forced to increase patrols in Australia’s northern waters to deal with ‘sea-borne migration’ sparked by rising sea levels in the Indo-Pacific” (Willacy). These reports and statements by government bodies and independent research centres like the Kaldor Centre highlight that the nature of increased border control in relation to climate change

relies on the continuation of a logic of exclusion. They argue against the claims of federal politicians and other powerful actants with stakes in these oceanic regions that have tried to scare the general public with the image of climate refugees inundating the country and a ‘return of the boats’, a figuration further analysed later in this chapter.

In Boochani’s *No Friend but the Mountains*, the inhibitive power of borders can be felt from the very beginning. In the modern nation state, borders signify inclusion and exclusion, inside and outside, those who belong and those who are excluded. Parvati Nair writes: “the border reduces human existence to binary opposites: legal/illegal, visible/invisible, recognized/unrecognized, with/without rights, and worse, life/death” (88). Boochani’s text complicates these binaries. In Manus Prison, as well as on the journey across the ocean to Australia, inside and outside merge. The first chapter opens with these lines of poetry: “*Under moonlight // An unknown route // A sky the colour of intense anxiety*” (1, italics original). They set the tone for the harrowing journey toward Australia that follows. The story that is told in 356 pages of blended prose and poetry is based on Boochani’s experiences crossing the ocean from Indonesia to Australia twice and his subsequent incarceration on Manus Island. In this journey and its fictionalisation in *No Friend but the Mountains*, several borders and boundaries become entwined. The territory that these borders are supposed to signify is moreover complicated and expanded beyond Australian territory itself. The Australian offshore detention system operates visibly and invisibly on Australian lands and waters, as well as on foreign soils, which in the case of Boochani’s text relates to Manus Island in PNG.

In narrating the two times he crossed the Timor Sea and his subsequent incarceration on Manus Island, Boochani’s text is first and foremost generative, calling for change by regaining control over a powerful system built on inequality, exclusion and censorship. In this chapter I examine several generative movements in *No Friend but the Mountains*. I analyse the text’s generation of space via Gloria Anzaldúa’s concept of ‘borderlands’. Boochani’s text also introduces a way of viewing Australia’s oceanic borders from the perspective of those living the borders rather than through the eyes of for instance the Australian photographer, journalist or politician. *No Friend but the Mountains* blends genre and stylistic convention in a way that is reminiscent of the political interventions of ‘fictocriticism’, a way of writing that came into focus in the 1990s and early 2000s, borne out of postmodernisms and the relation between creative writing and critical research. Elements of fictocriticism’s ‘border crossing’ characteristics can be seen in Boochani’s writing as he brings the reader into the boat, onto the island, and into Manus Prison. In these spaces and through his critique of the oppositional logic

that has long governed them, Boochani generates a different way of reading the ocean and surviving its crossing.

At the heart of Boochani's work lies a break with binary thought and a critique of the oppositional logic of the carceral state. Extending what Agamben calls "states of exception" and an "ambiguous zone" between law and politics, Boochani notes that these are "blurry place[s], and something that we see in our situation incarcerated in Manus, where we are both bound to, and at the same time abandoned by, Australian law" ("Australia"). The ocean in *No Friend but the Mountains* signifies the blurriness that connects abandonment and boundedness. To the narrator in the text, the ocean personifies a higher power, outside of the lawlessness that governs Australian border governance: "*The ocean has put me on trial / / The ocean has confronted me with a challenge / [...] The ocean provided me these opportunities / / The ocean introduced me to the most intimate relationship possible with death and fear*" (*No Friend* 70-72, italics original). In Boochani's text, the oceanic borderlands reimagine the lawless but bounded spaces that characterise transoceanic migration. Australia is a nation built on an imagination of insularity (Perera, *Australia*) and persistent inside/outside sentiments grounded in racialised inequalities, but its blurry edges reveal that the ocean undoes these borders, reshaping them into borderlands. In *Australia and the Insular Imaginary* (2009), Suvendrini Perera asks: "What if the ground beneath our feet turns out to be the sea?", if what defines Australia is "not *ground* [...] but rather the variable element that envelops and overlaps it" (1, italics original). The blurry places Boochani's writing and living body rewrites defy simplistic ideas of borders as solid boundaries. They recognise what Gloria Anzaldúa calls "a crossroads": living "[i]n the Borderlands / you are the battleground" (*Borderlands* 195). In the case of Boochani, this meant being a target of border control and state sanctioned violence to maintain Australia's illusion as a white insular island continent, a settler colonial dream of sovereignty built on the exclusion of non-white bodies.

Fictocriticism and the Political Intervention of Bordering Genres

Translator Omid Tofighian describes *No Friend but the Mountains* as a decolonial text and its genre as 'horrific surrealism':

Reality is fused with dreams and creative ways of re-imagining the natural environment and horrific events and architecture. Reality is also presented as a

form of free subconscious experience directed at multiple individuals, and including himself. (“Translators Reflections” 366)

Realistic descriptions of daily life on Manus are interspersed with dream-like sequences and philosophical analysis. Accounting for its theoretical engagement as well as its creative and imaginary form, another way of describing *No Friend but the Mountains* that takes its hybrid and blended use of form and genre into account is ‘fictocriticism’. Fictocriticism is a term popularised in the 1990s and early 2000s, particularly in Australia and Canada,⁶² that has drifted in and out of popularity since. Inspired by French philosophical and French feminist theories (in particular, the work of Jacques Derrida, Roland Barthes, Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva), fictocriticism builds on a poststructuralist and postmodern mode of writing that eschews fiction and criticism as mutually exclusive. It adopts a hybrid approach that unsettles the stability of each of these modes of writing in themselves. In “The Fall: Fictocritical Writing” (2002), Stephen Muecke cites Derrida — well-known for his love of neologisms and the idea that deconstruction of the text does not happen with either writer or reader, but in the text itself — who writes that “[w]e must invent (a name) for those ‘critical’ inventions which belong to literature while deforming its limits” (Derrida in Muecke 108). At the forefront of fictocritical writing is the blending of several disciplines and modes of writing, as well as experimentation with existence and selfhood. Muecke notes that it thereby collapses “the ‘detached’ and all-knowing subject *into* the text” (108, italics original). This repositioning of the author is reminiscent of how in, for instance, standpoint theory and postcolonial feminism, a binary opposition between subject and object is dissolved. Boochani’s *No Friend but the Mountains* falls into a fictocritical mode of writing in the sense that while the text is indebted to Boochani’s own experiences of border crossing and incarceration, it fictionalises these events, but also carefully integrates several theories, literary influences and histories to deliver its meaning. In both form and content, *No Friend but the Mountains* crosses borders. Ones that jump out are Kurdish folklore and resistance literature, prison literatures, Persian literary history, Manusian thought and culture, feminist psychoanalysis, border studies, Marxist and poststructuralist theory, decolonial and anticolonial criticism, autoethnography, classical myths and epics.

⁶² See Hancox and Muller (2011), and Rhodes (2013) for further historicization of fictocriticism and its academic reception.

In terms of authorship, the relationship between Boochani and translator Omid Tofighian is important to note. Much of the translation of the text from Farsi to English is described by Tofighian as “collaborative efforts between author, translator, consultants and confidants [that] matured into a shared philosophical activity” (“Translator’s Tale” xiv). Elizabeth Pattinson defines fictocriticism as focused “less on constructed notions of self than [...] on the reflexive, deconstructed self; the self of multiples [...] This communicates the self as an idea, something flexible, disputable” (2). *No Friend but the Mountains* does just this, in a way that falls outside of a conventional fiction/nonfiction dichotomy. The text is fictionalised and uses conventions of writing prose and poetry, yet stays close to historical and recent events, thereby simultaneously using conventions of the essay and the journalistic text. As Tofighian notes: “the book was produced simultaneously with journalism, investigative reports, a film, academic presentations, protest speeches and human rights advocacy” (xxiv). The plurality of its genre, which builds on several literary and oral storytelling traditions, is intertwined with the plurality of the writing process. Written in prison via text messages and voice recordings on a mobile phone that was first confiscated, then stolen and hidden in “a cavity he made deep within his mattress” (xxxiii), this book emphasises the nonlinearity of writing against established powers both in its authorship and its form.

Boochani shows his resistance to a system that tried to reduce people in detention centres to numbers and faceless data, by creating characters that are inherently plural and more than the sum of their individual histories. The book is a critique of Australia’s torturous offshore detention system and conveys its meaning by deconstructing the characteristics of any single refugee into an amalgam that can represent them all. In *No Friend but the Mountains*, he creates what Tofighian calls “composite characters” (Tofighian, “Translator’s Tale” xxxv), which are amalgams and allegorical collections of characteristics of several people he encountered during the time the book covers. As the “Disclaimer” that precedes the first chapter explains, this is not only a matter of style, but also one of safety. While overall, the book “has been written to give a truthful account of the experience of Australia’s Manus Island Regional Offshore Processing Centre, and to convey a truthful first-hand experience of what it has been like to have been detained within that system. [...] There are some limits to what can be revealed” (xxxv). Characters in *No Friend but the Mountains* carry allegorical names such as “The Blue Eyed Boy” and “The Prime Minister” in order to safeguard their privacy and vulnerability in a cruel system. This safety precaution is necessary in Boochani’s world, for oceanic borderlands and the reality of offshore detention and incarcerations are volatile and dangerous. The first-person narrator is implied to be Boochani himself, but throughout the text

stays nameless beyond the number he receives as a detainee under Australian border governance: MEG45. Only two people in the book appear by their given names; at the time of their death in the narrative, “The Gentle Giant” is revealed to be Reza Barati and the “Smiling Youth” Hamid Khazei. Both died on Manus and are “identified by name as a mark of respect” (xxxv).

The composition of characters and reliance on archetype further dissolves the binary opposition between subject and object, self and other, that is central to the power structure of the Australian offshore detention system and of Manus Prison. The fictiocritical mode of writing that Boochani adopts in *No Friend but the Mountains* lays bare the complex and unequal power structures at play in the Australian detention system. In the translator’s note that functions as an introduction, Tofighian describes Boochani’s renaming of characters and places as “a way to affirm his personhood and establish a sense of authority; naming is a way of reclaiming authority from the prison, disempowering the system and redirecting sovereignty back to the land” (xxvi). These boundary spaces and characters are the borderlands that Boochani’s *No Friend but the Mountains* creates. Delving deeper into his use of personification of the ocean to trigger a rearticulation of subjectivity, I want to underscore that while Boochani’s prose relies heavily on imagery and dreamlike descriptions, the oceanic boundary spaces he traversed to ultimately be granted asylum in Aotearoa New Zealand are not metaphorical. They are real, wet and dangerous spaces that have informed both the form and content of his work from Manus Prison. The oceanic borders he had to cross to reach Australia are boundary spaces that have cost many lives, in and out of the water. Sharon Pickering and Leanne Weber started the “Australian Border Deaths Database” as part of ‘Globalization and Borders: Deaths at the Global Frontier’ project.⁶³ At time of writing (March 2021), the total number of known deaths “associated with Australia’s borders since 1 January 2000” stands at 2030. Boochani connects space, both geographically and psychologically, to question the rigidity and violence with which the Australian detention system tries to uphold its boundaries. Anzaldúa’s notion of borderlands and its relationship to the entwining of space with identity offers a provocative way of engaging with the worlds Boochani describes. They are generative spaces that ultimately strengthen his aims: “I’ll continue challenging the system and I will win in the end. It’s a long road, but I’ll do it” (Tofighian, “Translator’s Reflections” 374).

⁶³ See Weber and Randolph’s March 2021 “Annual Report on Border-Related Deaths, 2020. Border Crossing Brief No. 18”, March 2021. www.monash.edu/_data/assets/pdf_file/0018/2523141/BOB-Research-Brief-18-border-deaths-annual-report-2020_Final.pdf for a report with data from 1 January 2000 to 31 December 2020 by the Australian Border Death Database.

Personifying the Ocean: Moving Bodies in the Waves

The border is part of Australia and it reproduces at home.

— Behrouz Boochani, *Twitter*

Hope and fear, powerlessness and survival, come together in Boochani's account of the bodies of water and the bodies of the refugees that entered treacherous waters to reach Australia. Looking closely at the first four chapters of *No Friends but the Mountains*, which describe the narrator's two journeys across the Timor Sea up until his arrival on the external Australian territory of Christmas Island, this section examines Boochani's personification of the ocean as a way to further undermine ideas of Australian border sovereignty. With the ocean as actor, the lack of control is visible at both sides of an imagined border; refugees are at the mercy of changing weather patterns, sudden storms and surging waves, as border governance scrambles to control an environment in constant flux with propaganda campaigns and narratives of deterrence that frame the dangers of asylum as outside of itself. Examining these two ways of externalising the ocean, I consider why both are the result of a system that aims to externalise oceanic borders.

Boochani's recollections of the events that led up to the interception on the second journey by the Australian navy are marked by extreme fear of the volatile ocean waters. In his account approaching the ocean, the reality of death at sea is foregrounded:

One imagines one's own death differently to the death of others. I can't imagine it. Could it be that these trucks travelling in convoy, rushing toward the ocean, are couriers of death?

No /

Surely not while they carry children /

How is it possible? /

How could we drown in the ocean? /

I am convinced that my own death will be different / (3, italics original)

That the journey is incredibly dangerous, and that many who have tried to cross before did not live to reach land again, is evident to the narrator, but he has no other options left: "Having to return to the point from which I started would be a death sentence" (8). Boochani writes of an ocean that is primarily 'foreign' and 'unfamiliar', particularly in the poetic sections that appear

italicised in the text: “*The dimensions of a boat // Unfamiliar waves // Waves of a foreign ocean*” (15, italics original). By comparison, Gloria Anzaldúa likens the life of Mexicans in the U.S. — of those whose status is ‘other’ and are living their lives on border and margins — to swimming in an ‘alien’ element: “[l]iving on borders and in margins, keeping intact one’s shifting and multiple identity and integrity, is like trying to swim in a new element, an ‘alien’ element” (*Borderlands* i). Similarly, Boochani’s depicts the ocean that the narrator must enter, at first carried by boat but eventually submerged into the water as the first boat sinks, as an alien element in which he must swim. Far removed from the mountains of his childhood and his dreams, the connections he draws between the ocean, death, and encountering the unfamiliar, are reinforced.

The ocean is described with words that convey its power: “[t]he sounds of the waves from the roaring ocean muffles other noises [...] *We have arrived at the ocean // The insane waves move back and forth along the beach // They seem eternal // A tiny boat sits a few metres out from the shore // No time to delay // We have to board*” (Boochani, *No Friend* 11, italics original). The words Boochani chooses in his description of the first time the narrator sees the ocean while in Indonesia — “*insane waves*”, “*they seem eternal*” — are representative of both the rightful fear of the dangerous voyage to come and his unfamiliarity with an oceanic environment. Fleeing from the mountainous region of Kurdistan, the narrator connects the unfamiliar oceanic environment and its towering waves with the magnitude and importance of the mountains, creating mountainous seascapes. The ocean is personified throughout the text, but presented not as a friend but as a relentless “*bitter*” foe, “*without mercy*”:

*Sinking into mountains of waves /
Drowning into the darkness /
sinking into the bitter ocean /
Swallowed up by the ocean /
Swallowed up without mercy. (37, italics original)*

On the first voyage, the waves rush into the boat. The narrator, along with dozens of others, are far out from the Indonesian coastline and the weather has changed. The narrator is asleep, dreaming of chestnuts and his mother, imagining himself “*an eagle // I am flying over the mountainous terrain // Over mountains covering mountains // There is no ocean in sight // From all ends, the territory is completely dry*” (30-31, italics original). When he wakes up, he enters what he can only describe as “a warzone” (32):

The whole place is beleaguered by waves, I haven't moved from my spot but notice that the waves are fiercer and more belligerent. I have been all over the boat. In one moment, my soul searches the whole place. Our fears are closer. I am under siege . . . (32)

The nouns, verbs and phrases that invoke this warzone — “beleaguered by waves”, “I am under siege” — reinforce the power differential at play. The boat starts to sink: “*The boat is a wreck // Split down the centre // Caught in the whirlpool of waves // Calls for help // The rescue boat is emerging*” (34, italics original). The Indonesian motorised fishing boat that has spotted them travels back and forth to rescue people off the sinking boat. With about twenty people left on the roof, “it occurs; we have come so close to capsizing over the last two days . . . and now it's actually happened, the boat is gone completely in less than two seconds” (37). The narrator is swept under water and must fight with all the energy he has left to come up to the surface again. Boochani recounts how his body is at war with the ocean and at war with death. He manages to reach the surface and swim to a spar of wood some of other men in the water have latched onto: “The sea seems to have an extraordinary desire to pull down the piece of wood and its distressed and exhausted passengers” (43). The people on the motorboat are able to rescue most of them out of the cold water, but it is too late for “The Blue Eyed Boy”: “*The ocean has performed its sacrifice // That river . . . this sea . . . // The meeting of both at this juncture. / The Blue Eyed Boy is dead*” (44, italics original). This reference to E.E. Cummings “Buffalo Bill's” — “how do you like your blue-eyed boy / Mister Death” — suggests that there is no escaping death. The personified ocean has taken one of the narrators' companions, in what is implied is payment for their passage.

Chapters thee and four — “The Raft of Purgatory / Moons Will Tell Terrible Truths” and “The Warship Meditations / Our Golshifteh is Truly Beautiful” — narrate a second journey across the ocean, “*Rescued. Relocated // A second boat // Another journey from Indonesia // Another trial; a test of the will // Unsure we will reach safety // Purgatory*” (45, italics original). With the boat intercepted outside of Indonesian waters by a British cargo vessel, who alert the Australian Navy, this second journey is characterised by a sense of temporary, suspended punishment: “*Purgatory*”, Boochani writes. This state between trial at water and the indefinite incarceration that — though they are unaware of it at this point in time — awaits the refugees as they enter Australian territory is reflected retroactively in Boochani's description of the state of the ocean, as ‘shrouded’ but “boundless”:

[the] searing sun shrouds the ocean, which resembles a warped mirror extending far away . . . boundless. The waves approach and depart, occasionally rocking our small white fishing vessel which rests beside a grand cargo ship [...] Our small craft is like a tiny pebble lying serenely under the shadow of a weighty boulder. The sun appears larger than usual; its radiation streams down, melting skin, smelting us, perhaps the only creatures on that enormous expanse, that wide open sea. (45)

Their fate at the hands of the Australian Border Force is foreshadowed. With the passengers soon to be condemned to years of exile, purgatory at the mercy of the Australian political climate, the ocean is still and “wide open”, personifying their trial on land in the years to come.

Externalising the ocean as an actor that takes, not gives, the personification of the ocean surfaces in Australian government narratives that are intended to advertise a campaign of fear to discourage refugees to flee by sea. In “Oceanic Corpo-graphies, Refugee Bodies and the Making and Unmaking of Waters”, Suvendrini Perera argues that the challenges posed to the ocean-crossing transnational refugee are inextricably bound up with Australia’s propaganda campaigns, including the ‘No to people smuggling’ propaganda, disseminated in the early to mid-2010s:

This consisted of a series of short films simulating the last moments of a death by drowning, accompanied by the sound of a frantic heartbeat slowly fading into silence. English versions of the videos were launched on YouTube, and the films, and accompanying posters, subtitled in Tamil and Farsi, were broadcast in Sri Lanka, Afghanistan and Pakistan to deter people seeking to flee by sea. (70)

Presented as a way of protecting refugees from exploitative people smugglers that only have their own interests at heart, these short films, or commercials, used already existent narratives of terror at sea. Underlying the purpose to deter potential refugees to flee by boat to Australia and convince potential smugglers of the immorality of transporting people to Australia, these campaigns aim to reinforce and normalise Australian border politics as the ‘natural order of things’ for the Australian viewer and voter at home. The thirty second film “Left Behind”, which Perera describes in the quote above, is accompanied by fear inducing lines such as: “NO

one knows where you are...”, “NO one can hear you...” and “NO one can trust a people smuggler”.(Australian Government, “Left Behind”) What is overlooked in these propaganda videos is Australia’s own responsibilities in the dangers of these ocean-crossings, which include an Australian Government led ‘disruption programme’ of people smuggling in Indonesia. According to questions asked in Senate by Opposition (Labor) leader John Faulkner on 25 September 2002, this programme included potentially “encouraging fuel suppliers not to supply fuel to vessels, not providing food for the vessels to sail, and putting sugar in the fuel tank or sand in the engine of a vessel”.⁶⁴ Propaganda such as the “‘no to people smuggling advertising’ campaign”, so Perera notes, are the “pretext of protecting refugees from dangers at sea: dangers that are produced by the very conditions that govern official policies designed to ensure that none of those who seek asylum by sea succeed in arriving on Australian shores” (75). They are attempts to externalise the danger of oceanic border crossings. They speculate that it is not Australia that lacks safety precautions, but rather, that danger lies outside of its borders that have to be ‘closed’ to protect people from the seas. They moreover legitimise the idea of ‘offshore’ detention centres, externalising the consequences of Australian border policies to foreign soil, further magnifying inside/outside distinctions.

Unable to escape the consequences of Australian carceral politics, Boochani was transferred from the Timor Sea to Christmas Island and then Manus Island for the next seven years. In an essay for *Overland*, “Australia, Exceptional in its Brutality”, he compares the system of indefinite offshore detention to Giorgio Agamben’s theory of the ‘state of exception’ (*stato di eccezione*), a structure of biopolitical significance that “is the preliminary condition for any definition of the relation that binds and, at the same time, abandons the living being to the law” (Agamben 1). Agamben argues that states of exception have become normalised, and that exception has become the rule. He foregrounds the 2001 U.S. Patriot Act, which “authorized the ‘indefinite detention’ and trial by ‘military commissions’”, erasing “any legal status of the individual, thus producing a legally unnamable and unclassifiable being” (3). The Taliban captured in Afghanistan were “[n]either prisoners nor persons accused, but simply ‘detainees’” and “are the object of a pure de facto rule, of a detention that is indefinite not only in the temporal sense but in its very nature as well, since it is entirely removed from the law and from judicial oversight” (3-4). Further developing Agamben’s analyses of contemporary power

⁶⁴ For the transcript of John Faulkner’s Additional Comments, see: www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Former_Committees/maritimeincident/report/e02t

relations and the sovereign state, Judith Butler notes that indefinite detention itself becomes a form of punishment and that those held at Camp Delta “are not even called ‘prisoners’”:

that would suggest that internationally recognized rights pertaining to the treatment of prisoners of war ought to come into play. They are [...] ‘detainees’, those who are held in waiting, those for whom waiting may well be without end.
(*Precarious Life* 64)

Butler’s chapter “Indefinite Detention” from *Precarious Life* (2004) ends with the foreboding statement that they fear that “the indefinite detainment of prisoners on Guantanamo, for whom no rights of appeal will be possible within federal courts, will become a model for the branding and the management of so-called terrorists in various global sites where no rights of appeal to international rights and to international courts will be presumed” (100). Such an extension of indefinite power and “self-aggrandizing state sovereignty at the expense of any commitment to global co-operation” is part of the system of Australian offshore detention of refugees that has long exploited its national insular and racialised imaginary, water boundaries and position as a white nation in the Black and brown Southern Pacific region to justify indefinite detention and deferral of accountability.

Boochani’s *No Friends but the Mountains* is full of the memories and feelings of someone who survived a perilous oceanic voyage only to be met with another punitive system holding him in waiting, without an end in sight. It complicates the Australian narrative that oceanic danger lies only outside its own borders, and outside of its control, merging inside and outside and bending the idea of Australia as a ‘state of exception’. Gloria Anzaldúa’s notion of ‘Borderlands’ is helpful to further analyse what happens in Boochani’s non-binary rendition of oceanic borders.

Anzaldúa’s Borderlands and Boochani’s Oceanic Entanglements

In *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987), Gloria Anzaldúa outlines her theory of borderlands in two overlapping ways. On the one hand, she refers to the physical borderland: the border that connects Texas, the U.S. Southwest, and Mexico. “[U]na herida abierta” — an open wound — where “two worlds merging [...] form a third country — a border culture” (3, *italics original*). “We didn’t cross the border, the border crossed us” has long been the “rallying cry of the Mexican/Chicanx immigrant rights movement”, writes Edward McCaughan (6). At

the end of the Mexican-American War, in 1848, Mexico lost half its territory to the United States. This created a time of turmoil and of racist violence, as Mexicans found themselves no longer on their own land but in occupied territories and had to decide between accepting U.S. citizenship or leaving for what was left of Mexico. It turned Mexicans into immigrants and “the continent’s Indigenous communities into oppressed minorities in a colonized nation” (7). Anzaldúa reminds her reader, with her analysis of borderlands, that “at the edge where earth touches ocean / where the two overlap”, sometimes this is “a gentle coming together / at other times and places a violent clash” (Anzaldúa 1).

On the other hand, there are “psychological borderlands, the sexual borderlands and the spiritual borderlands [that] are not particular to the Southwest” (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* i). These are the imagined, affective and felt borders, seams and wounds. “In fact”, she continues, “the Borderlands are physically present wherever two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory, where under, lower, middle and upper classes touch, where the space between two individuals shrinks with intimacy” (i). Borderlands operate metaphorically as ‘Borderlands’ with a capital *B*, when they stand for the meeting of edges that are reminiscent of a Deleuzian virtuality: “a state that exists whenever cultural differences exist, whether those cultures involve physical differences such as race, class, or gender or differences that are less tangible—psychological, social, or cultural” (Foss, Foss and Griffin 106). They are distinguished, but not separate, from ‘borderlands’ with a lower-case *b* that represent physical borderlands, specific geographical sites: “actual southwest borderlands or any borderlands between two cultures” (Anzaldúa, *Interviews* 176). In both its metaphorical and geographical meaning, *B*/borderlands represent a generative and transformative space where dualistic thinking transforms into what Anzaldúa calls the ‘new mestiza’ and a ‘mestiza consciousness’: a term derived from the Spanish word for ‘mixture’, *mestizaje*, that Anzaldúa uses to describe a nonbinary way of thinking and acting. This way of thinking is born out of Anzaldúa’s cultural background and upbringing as a *mestiza* herself (as someone “of mixed Indian and Spanish blood [...] Chicanos, Mexican-Americans, are the offspring” (Borderlands 5). *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* is a representation in writing of this mixture and simultaneity. In alternating prose and poetry, Anzaldúa is driven by all the voices that simultaneously speak to her, “*todas las voces que me hablan / simultáneamente*”:

Because I, *a mestiza*,
continually walk out of one culture
and into another,

because I am in all cultures at the same time,
alma entre dos mundos, tres, cuatro,
me zumba la cabeza con lo contradictorio,
Estoy norteadada por todas las voces que me hablan
simultáneamente. (77, italics original)

Gloria Evangelina Anzaldúa was a Chicana woman and feminist theorist who described herself as a “border woman” (i). She grew up between two cultures: “Mexican (with a heavy Indian influence) and the Anglo (as a member of a colonized people in our own territory)” (i). There are several parallels between Anzaldúa’s work and description of borderlands and the borderlands that appear in Boochani’s *No Friend but the Mountains* in relation to the meeting of border cultures on Australian, Indonesian and Papua New-Guinean waters and soils. Both are generative texts that use a mixture of forms and languages to convey their meaning in writing. Their aim is to start, not settle, and to change social structures, rather than define them with a certain stability. Since its publication in 1987, Anzaldúa’s notion of the ‘B/borderlands’ has steadily become her most famous idea and a prominent part of the canon of intersectional and decolonial feminist theory. It is an unfinished theory, and the idea of B/borderlands has evolved over time. Its plurality has grounded the theory of B/borderlands. Because it refers to both literal border spaces as well as Anzaldúa’s struggle to be part of several cultures at once, her several languages, her feelings of being caught in the space between identifying with her religion and spirituality, and her identity as a lesbian woman, B/borderlands have emerged as a highly adaptable mode of thought. Anzaldúa’s iteration is located specifically in her Chicana background, lesbian identity and location on Texas-U.S. Southwest/Mexican borderlands but generates space so that other borderlands can emerge.

Boochani’s text is similarly unfinished. It appeals to ongoing concerns such as colonialism and the incarceration and continued vilification of refugees around the world. Often described as ‘prison literature’,⁶⁵ it is connected to a corpus of literature written in incarceration, often by writers who, like Boochani, have been persecuted for their political, religious, or ethnic affiliations and backgrounds. In his acceptance speech for the 2018 Victorian Prize, sent via WhatsApp and given in absentia, Boochani writes that when he arrived on Manus Island, the image of a writer in exile, “a novelist in a remote prison”, was what

⁶⁵ See, for instance, Eleanor Davey’s review “Life in Stasis: Behrouz Boochani’s Manus Prison Literature” in *LA Review of Books* (2019) or Jeff Sparrow’s review “A Place of Punishment: *No Friend but the Mountains* by Behrouz Boochani” in *Sydney Review of Books* (2018).

enabled him to “uphold [his] dignity and keep [his] identity as a human being” (Boochani, “A Victory”). Boochani comes from a history of persecution, first as a Kurd in Iran, then as a detainee of Australia’s punitive system of mandatory detention of all ‘irregular’ migrants who arrive by boat. In *No Friend but the Mountains*, these seemingly distinct geographies mix into a ‘new mestiza’ and a new way of approaching border geographies and oceanic transmigration.

Like Anzaldúa’s identification as mestiza, Boochani’s Kurdish ethnic and cultural background informs the borderlands he invokes in his writing of life inside the Australian detention system and his accounts of oceanic border crossings. The Kurdish people have faced persecution, exile and colonisation for over a century. Güneş Murat Tezcür identifies the origins of the so-called ‘Kurdish question’ with the “defeat of the Ottoman Empire in 1918. As the nascent Kurdish nationalism failed to develop sufficient strength, ethnic Kurds ended up being marginalised minorities in the newly emerging nation-state system in the Middle East” (1). In the century that followed the end of the Ottoman empire, it has been difficult to define, let alone obtain sovereignty for a ‘Kurdish nation’. Kurdistan spans several contemporary nation states — Iraq, Iran, Turkey and Syria — each with its own incentives to uphold boundaries, political interests and international alliances. The title of Boochani’s novel, *No Friend but the Mountains*, refers to a Kurdish proverb that indicates the Kurds’ self-reliance in the midst of adversity:

I am a child of war [...] My mother always sighed and would say: ‘My boy, you came into this world in a time we called the flee and flight years.’ [...] A time when people would run to the mountains from fear of the warplanes. Everything they had and could carry they took with them. They found asylum within chestnut oak forests.

Do the Kurds have any friends other than the mountains? (Boochani 258-259, italics original)

For the Kurds, the mountains have been a site of escape from persecution and violence, their “chestnut oak forests” of asylum. For Boochani, having to immerse himself in seascapes and in the ocean is a stark moment of departure from the mountainous life of Kurdistan. No longer safe in the mountains, however, and craving freedom from having to hide from the Iranian authorities, Boochani merges ocean and mountain, entangling both these geographical spaces in his writing of living in oceanic borderlands.

Anzaldúa's description of borderlands centres an identification with the fluidity of the borders between land and sea. She lives the border, materially inhabits its spaces, and transits through them to break their rigidity and open them up to a more hybrid interpretation:

This is my home
this thin edge of
barbwire.

But the skin of the earth is seamless.
The sea cannot be fenced.
el mar does not stop at borders.
(Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 3, italics original)

Her accounts of borderlands are always material as well as discursive. Anzaldúa describes the borderline as a “1,950 mile-long open wound / dividing a *pueblo*, a culture / running down the length of my body, / staking fence rods in my flesh, / splits me splits me / *me raja me raja*” (2, italics original). These material-discursive spaces are “not a comfortable territory to live in, this place of contradictions” (1). The open wound of the border is a dangerous space for the refugees or the now-made immigrants along the U.S.-Mexican border whose moving bodies challenge the stability of its boundaries. By showing how volatile and unstable borderlands are, they confront the regulatory norms and what Judith Butler famously called the ‘matter of bodies’. In *Bodies that Matter* (1993) Butler asks: “what qualifies as bodies that matter, ways of living that count as ‘life’, lives worth protecting, lives worth saving, lives worth grieving?” (xxiv). Anzaldúa's notion of borderlands and Boochani's *No Friend but the Mountains* similarly address whose bodies matter, whose do not, and how the difference between these bodies has been established. Reinscribing the excluded and censored realm of the oceanic borderlands that connect the U.S./Mexico/Australia to the rest of the world with the presence and constant rearticulation of their moving bodies, these texts cast doubt on the idea that power lies only on the inside of border demarcations. They show that border stability relies on the constant production of the outside as unwelcome. As Etienne Balibar notes in a 2002 discussion of European borders and identity: “border areas—zones, countries, and cities—are not marginal to the constitution of a public sphere but rather are at the centre” (72).

Moving from borders to the boats that transgress them, what then happens when the bodies of refugees connect, turning borders-boats-bodies into figurations that are, following

Rosi Braidotti, “materialistic mappings of the situated, i.e., embedded and embodied, social positions” (4). I analyse these figurations to show how *No Friend but the Mountains* upends both the invisibility and hypervisibility of twenty-first century refugees who try to come to Australia by boat. In Boochani’s articulation of specific iterations of the border-industrial complex on Manus Island — the result of colonial trajectories that exclude some and welcome others — the idea of ‘boat people’ becomes undone.

Borders-Boats-Bodies: Figurations

Click, click /

Waiting to take their photos /

Click, click.

— and dispatch the images to the whole world. They are completely mesmerised by the government’s dirty politics and just follow along. The deal is that we have to be a warning, a lesson for people who want to seek protection in Australia.

— Behrouz Boochani, *No Friend but the Mountains*

In *Regarding the Pain of Others* (2003), the last book Susan Sontag published in her lifetime, she reflects on the history and contemporary iterations of images of war. Like her earlier writing, such as *On Photography* (1977), it is a meditation on representation, on seeing and visibility. The medium of photography has a specific relationship to witnessing, to the image, and to cruelty: “[b]eing a spectator of calamities taking place in another country is a quintessential modern experience” (18), Sontag writes. ‘Regarding the Pain of Others’, following Sontag, is a trope in the depiction of war in Western art and journalism: “if it bleeds, it leads” (18), the adage of tabloids and news shows goes. The book, or long essay, *Regarding the Pain of Others* was borne out of her lifelong reflections on war and representation. In the early twenty-first century, just post-9/11 and at the start of the U.S. ‘War on Terrorism’, Sontag historicises war photography’s relationship to reality. The medium of photography has close ties to fidelity as well as a history of set-ups and re-enactments. In *Regarding the Pain of Others*, she reflects on the two central ideas of *On Photography*: that images draw the attention, but, secondly, that “in a world saturated, no, hyper-saturated with images, those that should matter have a diminishing effect: we become callous” (104) and that “after repeated exposure it also becomes less real” (105). Between writing these ideas as core features of photography in 1977 and 2003 she has come to question them ideas as the essence of the medium: “As much as they create

sympathy, I wrote, photographs shrivel sympathy. Is this true? I thought it was when I wrote it. I'm not so sure now" (105). Does the proliferation of images undermine their authority and our moral and ethical responses? Or does their absence create something else entirely? In *Regarding the Pain of Others* she argues for the need to see, and she critiques a collective 'we'. Who are these people who have become desensitised to the images of horror? "To speak of reality becoming a spectacle", Sontag writes:

universalizes the viewing habits of a small, educated population living in the rich part of the world, where news has been converted into entertainment [...] It assumes that everyone is a spectator. It suggests, perversely, unseriously, that there is no real suffering in the world. But it is absurd to identify the world with those zones in the well-off countries where people have the dubious privilege of being spectators, or of declining to be spectators, of other people's pain [...] There are hundreds of millions of television watchers who are far from inured to what they see on television. They do not have the luxury of patronizing reality. (110-111)

To follow Sontag's poignant critique of the luxury of complacency and the privilege of spectatorship, what happens to the spectator in the case of oceanic and island-based terror and injustice? When those subjected to violence are further removed from the everyday Australian citizen, with access to detention centres not only barred by fences, but oceans as well? How does the convergence of highly mediated news reporting and constant CCTV surveillance of refugees in detention influence the form oceanic border visibility takes? Boochani's fictocritical novel responds to these ideas of visibility and invisibility of the refugees held on Manus Island, both in the words that are used to describe them, and the reporting in mainstream Australian media.

In the common contemporary Australian vernacular, people traversing the ocean by boat to seek refuge in Australia have been referred to as 'boat people'. The term 'boat people' distances the Australian public from the identities of the individuals who arrive in Australia by boat. It universalises and simplifies the journey across the ocean as something a group of unnamed 'others' undertakes, ignoring the close connection of settler colonial Australia to boat migration. The term 'boat people' does not extend to the British convicts transported over sea to the early Australian colonies in the last eighteenth and early nineteenth century, nor any of the mass migration from Britain, Ireland and Southern-European countries that followed in the

nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Instead, the two-word descriptor ‘boat people’ entered the Australian vernacular in the 1970s as the first ‘wave’ of Indochinese refugees sought asylum from the Vietnam War. In April 1976, five men arrived in Darwin from Vietnam on a small wooden boat: “they had been two months at sea, travelled 3,500 kilometres, and had found their way to us with the aid of a page torn from a school atlas” (Betts 34). The first 1043 Indochinese refugees were accepted as permanent settlers by Australia by mid-1979. However, those arriving after March 1978 “were informed that they would have to submit an application to the government’s new inter-departmental Determination of Refugee Status (DORS) Committee” (Higgins 89). From then onward, Australian media have identified different ‘waves’ of refugees — terminology that is interesting in itself, considering the connotations of ‘waves’ with overwhelming undulatory movements of large bodies of people (immigrants, invaders, soldiers, military vehicles), receding over time or repeated by more of the same movement (OED) — arriving by boat alongside an increase in the vilification of those still defined in the media and public debate as ‘boat people’.

The notion of ‘boat people’ is particularly significant in relation to the Pacific region, which has not only seen centuries of boat-aided Western colonisation but also has a deep history of Pacific boat and canoe cultures. In *Routes and Roots* (2011), Elizabeth DeLoughrey shows how, in the second half of the twentieth century, the voyaging Pacific canoe inspired new generations of Pacific cultural production and the formation of island histories. Unlike the alienating treatment of refugees and maritime migrants, the canoe and Pacific seafaring have become “icons of native movement, of rooted routes”, where “ancient Pacific travelers are not depicted as rootless ‘boat people,’ but rather as cosmopolitan ‘people of the sea’” (128). The semantics of Pacific voyaging in the English language is distinct from the language used to describe boat migration into Australia. As DeLoughrey explains:

Just as the English language demarcates positive progress through metaphors of self-determining movement, indigenous seafaring provides an imaginative reservoir for ‘charting,’ ‘navigating,’ and ‘plotting’ a course that is not overdetermined by the trajectories of western colonization. (128)

The language used in *No Friend but the Mountains* counteracts the language the Australian government uses to describe people arriving to Australian territorial waters. Boochani does not write of the ‘SIEV’, the Suspected Illegal Entry Vessel: the acronym assigned by the Australian Border Force to boats that cross the ocean toward Australian waters. Nor does he call the place

where he is confined the Manus Island Detention Centre. Rather, Boochani calls it ‘Manus Prison’ and the craft he travels in ‘the boat’. He calls the journey he is on “the voyage, to arrive at my destiny at the end of this odyssey” (*No Friend*, 74-75). Describing his journey as a Western classical tale, a heroic journey over the sea, subjected to exile and torture, Boochani undoes the Australian narrative that aims to render him and his vessel ‘other’, ‘illegal’ and the intruder.

In Rosi Braidotti’s ‘nomadic theory’, understanding concepts as ‘figurations’ is a way to think of concepts as embodied. Coming from a feminist posthumanist and Deleuzian feminist background, Braidotti writes about the figuration of the nomad as a “living map” that is concretely situated and embodied, socially, and historically, and offers a way to account for the self as transformative (Braidotti 10). A figuration is a “politically informed image of thought that evokes or expresses an alternative vision of subjectivity” (22). Boochani’s generative text creates figurations that envelop the borders-boats-bodies as borderlands and living maps. Like Anzaldua’s and Braidotti’s concepts, the border, boat and body in Boochani’s work are not metaphors. They are a commitment to the materiality of these positions. Boochani writes that:

A savage law governs all boats destined for Australia. If anyone were to lose their life during the trip, their corpse never reaches dry land. I hear that captains mercilessly leave people stranded among the waves. If I had died on this trip, I’m sure they would’ve tossed my corpse into the ocean without a second thought – thrown out there as fodder for sharks and strange fish. (Boochani, *No Friend* 50-51)

In these sentences, the position of border-boat-body comes together to inform a relationality that relies on a “network of exchanges” (Braidotti 11). The boats that are intercepted at sea are destroyed and left there, invoking what Christina Sharpe calls the ‘wake’ of slavery and afterlives of colonialism. Australian artist Ian Howard has produced several ‘rubblings’ or ‘frottages’ of state fixtures and installations such as the *Berlin Wall* (1974). In May 2015, for a piece called *Waterline*, he made a piece out of wax on canvas from the HMAS Albany and a Foreign Fishing Vessel (FFV) at the Australian Navy headquarters in Darwin (Olubas 7). There was no SIEV there to rub. Howard explains:

Once passengers and crew are removed, SIEVs are destroyed at sea, so there are none ‘available’ for the rubbing. ... There was a small flotilla ... of FFVs moored in the harbour. I chose this one as the pilot of our Zodiac from the Albany from which the rubbing was conducted remarked on approach: ‘this one is just like the boats we take the people off.’ (Howard in Olubas 8)

Borders, boats and bodies are left at sea in Australia’s border regime. They are all part of these oceanic borderlands. As Braidotti notes, figurations are “self-reflexive and not parasitic upon a process of metaphorization of ‘others’. On the contrary, they target dominant subject formations from within” (11). Borders-boats-bodies reclaim their subjectivity from within an exclusionary system, breaking apart the binaries that aim to suppress them.

Suvendrini Perera and Joseph Pugliese rename Australia’s offshore detention centres in the Pacific ‘black sites’. Black sites are paradoxical zones, characterised by secrecy, exclusion and non-visibility, but “simultaneously constituted by their very visibility, precisely as *black sites*, that is, as zones that are conspicuously and publicly cordoned off from the space of the nation’s civic life” (86, italics original). The black sites of detention centres are full of CCTV cameras but lack accountability. The journalists that the narrator of *No Friend but the Mountain* meets upon arrival on Christmas Island, as well as in Indonesia after almost drowning on his first voyage, swarm around him for photographs “like vultures: waiting until the wretched and miserable exit the vehicle; eager for us to come out as quickly as possible, to catch sight of the poor and helpless and launch on us” (Boochani, *No Friends* 91). The Australian government produces information and ‘fact sheets’ — some of which I have (critically) cited in this chapter — “that insidiously work to further the nation-state’s political agendas with regard to asylum seekers and refugees” (Perera and Pugliese 86). Perera and Pugliese’s article asks how the dualities of “visibility and non-visibility, legality and illegality” (86) can be reframed and exceeded. They are part of a collective, Researchers Against Pacific Black Sites (RAPBS), that has staged performances and produced short films. Boochani’s voice appears in the 2015 performance *Call to Account*, that informs their chapter, a piece that “seeks to be the antithesis of this kind of ‘advertising’ or amplifying of horrors” and instead is “a holding to account of the state” (91).

Boochani’s writing can be typified as a ‘call to account’, an exposé of the black sites of oceanic borderlands and island-exile via poetic text and critical enquiry. Both the prison and the voyage are used by the Australian government as ‘object lessons in ‘deterrence’, ways of excluding those deemed ‘other’, to reinforce an image of stability, sovereignty and an insular

nation. Boochani's text holds the state to account, not only by showing the horrors of the system, but also by amplifying the multiplicity and instability of voices of those who are and have been detained via the connections of borders, boats and bodies — the same figuration that the system tries to solidify.

Conclusion

An island /

A prison /

A jungle /

An ocean /

Squadrons of birds /

Casts of crabs /

Armies of frogs /

Orchestras of crickets /

Until then they had not encountered the breath of humans /

Political slogans /

Pristine nature /

Paradox /

A landscape of contradictions.

— Behrouz Boochani, *No Friend but the Mountains*

In 1904, the Immigration Restriction Act 1901 (also known as the 'White Australian policy') that aimed to secure only white (British) settlement on Australian soils and restrict 'coloured' and Black labour was extended with the 'White Ocean Policy'. Like its 1901 predecessor, the White Ocean Policy was implemented to protect the employment of white Australians. Stating that "no shipping company employing black labour would be permitted to carry Australian mail" (Russell 178), it extended the White Australia policy from land to sea, and thereby continued Australia's history of Indigenous dispossession and deterritorialisation. Immigration policies aimed at solidifying Australia as a white nation in an otherwise Black and brown Pacific region continued when a century later offshore detention centres opened to detain racialised refugees and immigrants on former Australian colonial territories in the Pacific. Australia's colonial presence is alive on PNG's Manus Island and the island nation Nauru. Manus Island has a long history of imperial exploitation, with military bases from both

Australia and Japan during the Second World War. And like Banaba, Ocean Island, Nauru was thoroughly mined for phosphates in the early twentieth century, resulting in decades of legal battles after Nauru won its independence in 1967 (Anghie 445). These histories of blue coloniality and the extraction of white phosphates for white colonial purposes reinforce ideas of a Pacific region with Australia at its centre, and island nations like Nauru on the fringes. The political exile of thousands of refugees to these islands, resulting in several deaths and long-lasting health complications for many, draws the attention to the ongoing Australian oceanic colonial project that Boochani's work depicts and undermines.

What Boochani calls a "*Paradox / A landscape of contradictions*" (334, italics original) is a fight to break through the racist fiction that underlies Australian sovereignty and the border control policies it enacts in oceanic spaces. These oceanic borderlands, black sites of oceanic border crossings, indefinite detention and exile in prisons run by the Australian government on once or still colonised soils, expose the paradoxical nature of the Australian nation. The border, the boat and the body of the unwanted refugee are embodied concepts — figurations — invoked in Boochani's work to break through the static representation of oceanic borders as controllable and bastions of 'safety'. It exposes these borderlands as constitutive of the Australian nation in both the past and the present. No longer 'inside', or behind 'closed borders', Australia is produced through its relationship with its Pacific neighbours and histories of immigration and racial vilification. In *No Friend but the Mountains*, the oceanic borderlands that bridge these lands and waters, show that they were never empty, never *terra* or *aqua nullius*, and that they fight back.

Conclusion

can you guess two “c” words
so closely connected, they are the same?
cook and cunt?
nice try. *colonialism* and *climate change*
fight one and you fight them both
— Ellen van Neerven, “Paper Ships, Many Fires”

Sea words — ‘c’ words. They bring this dissertation together: colonialism, climate change, coastlines, (o)ceans. Ellen van Neerven rightfully addresses their inherent connection, “fight one and you fight them both” (line 25). The artists, writers and scholars that read and write the waters of Oceania confirm that colonialism and climate change are so closely connected, they have become part of the same watery material. Their connectivity becomes especially visible when we pay attention and listen to the ocean. With our feet in the water, we start to experience a sea change. We can hear the waves coming in. Silt and sand between our toes, these waters are shifting and so are its blue ocean stories.

In this conclusion, many oceans are at stake. This dissertation focuses on one ocean, the Pacific, one region, Oceania, and its associated seas and coastlines. What can be learnt from their colonial climate change narratives, the blue oceanic stories that have emerged in recent years, comes from many different places and has wider implications. The published and performed work from Oceania that this dissertation analyses opens new possibilities to address past, present and future effects of colonialism on the changing oceanic environments of this highly watery region. What are the implications of these stories and imaginaries from Oceania for the study of the ocean in the blue and environmental humanities? To answer this question, Astrida Neimanis’ words come to mind: “Imaginaries are made through the entanglements of matters – both wet and wordy” (*Bodies of Water* 184). The imaginaries and stories that frame this research exemplify the entanglement of wet words, wet worlds and material imaginaries. With Sylvia Wynter we can see that the human, as a storytelling species, can tell a different story for earthly survival. A story that no longer relies on modern, colonial, capitalist inventions, but tells us of the entanglement of humans, ocean, kelp, handfish and coral. The implications of these wet, material and naturecultural stories is that I believe the blue and environmental humanities can no longer in good faith conceptualise the ocean as a frontier, as empty, flat,

alien or unknown. Western theory has long ignored the thought, art and writing from places it did not conceive of as central to its worldview, at best addressing the concerns of non-Western ontologies and epistemologies as a side note or an afterthought. Art and literature from Oceania consistently negate this erasure and asserts its centrality through narrative disruption. This is not to say that we should only see what happens when Western theory casts its eye outward, to marginalised oceans, and marginalised stories. The idea of marginalisation reiterates the imagined centrality of the West. What remains most important to me, as a Western researcher of colonial heritage, is for Western theorisations of the oceans to change. Cast our view outward, yes, but only to reassess what shapes our vision, to question the biases within.

In *Caribbean Discourse* (1989), Caribbean philosopher Édouard Glissant writes: “The West is not in the West, it is a project, not a place” (Glissant 2n1). The ocean, too, has long been interpreted in Western discourse as project instead of place. The thematic chapters in this dissertation address what happens when the ocean moves beyond the restrictions imposed by a singular Western definition of alterity. No longer ‘other’, the ocean in the work of Ellen van Neerven, Gina Cole, Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner, Craig Santos Perez, Lucienne Rickard, Mandy Quadrio and Behrouz Boochani show that when we read the water, we can begin a journey of undoing, unthinking and unworlding the lasting legacies and afterlives of colonialism in Oceania.

Chapter one, “Blue Ocean Theories”, shows that blue has long been an imperial colour of choice. From navy blue to ultramarine and indigo, Western ideals of grandeur and otherworldly riches became synonymous with blue at a time that empires expanded. Between the ground lapis lazuli rocks mined from Afghan mountains and the plans for a U.S. *Blue Origin* Moon colony, a connection between blue oceans and blue colonialism continues into the present. Contemporary feminist and environmental humanities scholarship that reimagines the world through oceanic and blue theories takes responsibility for and address the colonality of Western oceanic imaginaries via the deep history of Black Atlantic, Caribbean and Pacific scholarship, art and thought. Thinking about the ocean is not a new or ground-breaking ‘turn’ in Oceania, where life and knowledge has been oceanic for thousands of years. Questioning the centrality of the Atlantic and moving beyond ideas of the ocean as alien or a frontier to cross and combat, the future of blue and oceanic scholarship has the potential to be more than a playground for Western and imperial fantasies.

“Storytelling as Anticolonial Method”, chapter two, addresses the potential of storytelling to counter hegemonic Western colonial narratives and the overrepresentation of

Man. Sylvia Wynter and Ursula Le Guin disrupt the dominance of Western Man and the hero narrative that drives him. Anticolonial climate change realities become possible when we interrogate the origins stories that normalised Western modernity. Wynter's epistemic disobedience and Le Guin's carrier bag theory of fiction propose a radical rupture in the knowledges and stories that have sustained the Western imaginary. Donna Haraway, Thom van Dooren and Deborah Bird Rose offer the praxis of 'worlding' and 'bearing witness'. Telling anticolonial stories is a method to shift Western worldviews and undo the colonality embedded in Western oceanic thought.

Four thematic chapters show how narrative disruption emerged to unsettle climate colonialisms in Oceania. Across all four chapters, resistance against continued colonisation and cultural resurgence is foregrounded. Chapter three, "Mining Ocean Islands", and chapter four, "A Pacific Anthropocene Poetics", show how notions of belonging, home, and the maternal are recast in the work of Ellen van Neerven, Gina Cole, Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner and Craig Santos Perez. Feminist and queer theory offers a shift in perspectives in relation to the materiality and embodiment of ocean and water spaces. In van Neerven and Cole's work, the histories and present practice of phosphate and sandmining is disrupted by characters who queer and dislodge Western binary ideas of nature and culture, inclusion and exclusion, human/nonhuman. Plumwood's 'shadow places' rise from Aboriginal waters and melt in Banaban hands, to dissolve colonial control of Oceania and angle its liquid materiality toward Indigenous futures.

The poetry of Jetñil-Kijiner and Perez furthers Oceanic resistance and unsettles the militarisation of the Pacific Ocean. The Marshall Islands and Guåhan have been used by U.S. naval forces as a nuclear testing site and military base respectively to expand its imperial reach in the Pacific region. Jetñil-Kijiner's and Perez's written and performed poetic work undoes the silencing of Pacific Island communities. Their voices are loud and reinscribe the Pacific Ocean with the genealogy of mother ocean. Against stereotypes about disappearing islands and communities already 'lost' to rising sea levels, their work asserts they deserve more than the bare minimum: "we deserve / to do more / than just / survive / we deserve / to thrive" (Jetñil-Kijiner, "Dear Matafele Peinam" 88-93).

In chapter five, "Kelp Encounters", the visual and performance art of Lucienne Rickard and Mandy Quadrio calls the viewer and audience to action by questioning narratives of extinction. In Rickard's *Extinction Studies*, species considered lost appear on paper through the touching of hands. Rickard's hands touch the hands of species whose touch can only be recalled, asking 'what remains' and how we can fight for the survival of those on the brink of extinction. The extinction of the lutruwita/Tasmanian Smooth Handfish has colonial origins that re-emerge

in the climate instability of the lutruwita/Tasmanian waters. Extinction narratives display their culpability in the continued colonisation of palawa Tasmanian Aboriginal lands and waters. Mandy Quadrio's installation shows how extinction narratives have colonial origins and have been used against Tasmanian Aboriginal nations and communities. Her kelp work crosses boundaries, connecting ocean to coast, asserting palawa Tasmanian Aboriginal sovereignty. The ocean is intrinsically multiple. Used as surface by Europeans, and increasingly penetrated for fracking, aquaculture and other large-scale extractive capitalist economies, its depths create vast spaces of differing significance. The colonial scales of the ocean include the depths where kelp creates habitat for a variety of species, casting the ocean as a site of spiritual and cultural belonging, vast spaces of potential connection, as well as historical loss.

The questions concerning erasure and extinction that lay at the heart of "Kelp Encounters" play a vital role in the promulgation of potentially harmful stereotypes of island disappearance. It is not enough to address the problems that emerge when the sea has risen too high or more extreme weather hits the Oceanic region. Not enough to look with compassion from afar but stop at the threshold of political change. Conceptualising Oceania merely as a region of disappearance, or as the site of acceptable losses on the way to a more stable future, erases the historical and enduring resistance against colonialism and its reverberation in climate change realities. This resistance connects the art of Quadrio and Rickard, to the poetry of Jetñil-Kijiner and Perez, and the short stories of Cole and van Neerven.

That these connections of resistance are not self-evident, is exemplified in chapter six, "The Waves, the Ocean". Behrouz Boochani's *No Friend but the Mountains* crosses the paradox of border control in Australia — a country of settlers who came by boat to occupy Aboriginal Nations and deny the arrival of others. Immigration politics cannot be uncoupled from climate colonialisms. Environments continue to change as the boundaries between immigration and climate refugees blur. The imagined oceanic border stability in Australia and exile of refugees to territorial islands show that islands continue to be thought of as remote and removed from Western centres of power. Reimagining the margins, Boochani's story of oceanic crossings reassesses the boundaries drawn across the waves. The agency of the waters that keep his protagonist from reaching safer grounds, amplify the instability of oceanic borders.

The ocean is a site of vast material connection. Teresia Teaiwa reminds us that the ocean always already exists within us: "We sweat and cry salt water, so we know that the ocean is really in our blood" (Teresia Teaiwa, as cited in Hau'ofa, "The Ocean in Us" 409). Blue ocean stories have shaped human life but have been exploited for Western gain. Yet as writers and artists from Oceania show, the oceanic borderlands that were once solely positioned as zones

of division, have always been zones of belonging and material connection. Shifting perspectives from frontiers to immersion, we can now see that the future is oceanic.

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