Chapter 18
Transmedia Environmental Poetry in the Pacific: Between Literature and the New Media

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Abstract

Poetry is a major artistic expression in the Pacific, due to a longstanding tradition of indigenous oral literature. In the present climate emergency, "poet-performers" or "spoken word artists" have risen in this geographic area as militant figures that compose poetry and act it out on websites, in videos, during public performances and in important political venues. Pacific poets trespass the boundaries of a single medium and genre, mixing narratives, poetry, music, acting, photographs, videos, and paintings. They have created a transmedia form of art, in which integrated elements of a narrative are dispersed through different channels to offer a unified experience. Spoken word artists make use of the potential offered by new technologies and the web to form a participatory environment, which can give visibility to people who need to have their voices heard. My contribution will analyze a selection of Pacific performance poems from an aesthetic, literary, and environmental point of view, showing their transmedia nature.

Keywords

Pacific spoken word poetry; transmedia; environmental activism and new media; C. Santos Perez; *The Missing Slate*.

The Pacific Region: Past and Present

Since the beginning of the sixteenth century and the arrival of European explorers, the history of Pacific islands has been one of exploitation, first by European powers, then by the USA and Japan. Spanish, Portuguese, and Dutch voyagers claimed those territories for their governments (or the governments sponsoring them), followed by British, French, and German ones. Oceania was mapped into three main sub-divisions by nineteenth century Western geographers and given denominations that imply a vision of the area as fragmented (Polynesia), small (Micronesia), and inhabited by black (and therefore inferior) people (Melanesia). Maps and atlases represented the Pacific as a "lost sea". They fabricated a vision of the ocean as "terra nullius", «clear of data irrelevant to navigational purposes» (Heim 2015: 183), and depicted the islands as mere anchoring points in an ocean which becomes the natural space for free trade, thus fostering «the notion of a socially empty space» (Heim 2015: 184). Cartography contributed to forming the idea of the Pacific «not as a place to live but an expanse to cross, a void to be filled with lines of transit» (*ibidem*). The idea of the Pacific as a network of relationships between peoples and cultures — a sophisticated eco-system elaborated throughout centuries of interconnection between humans and the environment — was totally ignored by the Western imperialist powers together with the concept of the sea as a means of connection rather than of separation, a view conversely highlighted by Epeli Hau'ofa, in his seminal essay "Our Sea of Islands" (1993). The Tongan-Fijian sociologist, in fact, contrasts the Western vision of Oceania as small "islands in a far sea" with the holistic image of "a sea of islands" (Hau'ofa 2008: 37), suggesting that the deep bond of Pacific islanders with the ocean is encompassed in an ontological view that was crushed under the commercial capitalist logic of profit.

The Rise of New Transmedia Artistic Genres in the Pacific

In the course of three centuries the Pacific was colonized and its islands and waters were exploited for their natural resources, including copra (the dried meat of the coconut), tuna, whales, sugar, trees, phosphate, and other minerals. Poet and scholar Craig Santos Perez, from Guåhan/Guam[1], underlines how the Pacific islands have been used as commercial plantations, military bases, nuclear

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1   The island in the Mariana archipelago was called Guam after it became a territory of the USA. Guåhan is its indigenous name in the CHamoru language (this has been the official orthography of Chamorro since 2018). It means "we have" or "a place that has" (Santos Perez 2021: 10-11).

testing grounds, detention centers, mines, shipping harbors, and tourist destinations, and to carry out agricultural experiments, for example those with genetically modified crop fields (Santos Perez 2017). In his "Guest Editorial" to a 2017 special number of the online journal *The Missing Slate*, focused on «Pacific Islander Climate Change Poetry», Santos Perez refers to Western development as «the history of carbon colonialism» that has caused the global climate crisis and underlines how climate change is pushing the Pacific to the brink of habitability. Unpredictable weather, in particular devastating tropical storms alternated to droughts, makes crops fail. Rise in temperature and droughts cause fires. Ocean warming and acidification of the sea have led to coral bleaching and sea life destruction. Another consequence of ocean warming is sea-level rise and the erosion of habitable and cultivable land, causing the disappearance of entire islands and nations. Western «environmental imperialism», says Santos Perez, «has bulldozed, dredged, contaminated, irradiated, bombed, depleted, and destroyed the health and biodiversity of Pacific ecologies» (2017), creating an entire generation of climate refugees.

The poems he has selected for the special number are examples of a new form of militant civil poetry that is spreading in the area to describe the disastrous effects of global warming, denounce its causes, draw the public attention and prompt rapid measures, especially from the "developed" industrial powers that caused climate change in the first place. A young generation of "poet-performers" or "spoken word artists" has in fact risen in many of the countries affected by the climate emergency as militant figures who write poetry and act it out on websites, in public performances and during important political venues and Climate Summits, such as the United Nations Climate Change conferences, the so-called COP (that is, Conference of the Parties to the UNFCCC)[2]. "Performance poetry" or "spoken word poetry" can be defined as a genre orally performed before an audience or recorded in videos uploaded on the web, dealing with contemporary serious issues, and characterized by fast rhythm, film images or pictures, sounds or music, and improvisation. Some poems can also appear in printed versions and/or published collections.

Poetry has become a militant instrument within the international political events because it seems to be an efficient vehicle to convey a narrative that does not only explain but shows, does not only analyze problems rationally but touches sensibility and feelings, producing a deep emotional involvement. Marshallese Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner, for example, performed one of her most compelling environmental poems dedicated to her baby daughter, "Dear Matafele Peinam", at the 2014 United Nations Climate Summit in New York to urge effective policies by the industrialized "First World" in order to contain the rise

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2   UNFCCC means "United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change". The 198 countries that have ratified the Convention are called Parties to the Convention.

of global temperature and, consequently, the sea-level rise that is devastating the Marshall Islands. Her performance, followed by the appearance of her husband and daughter in the flesh, caused the standing ovation of the UN members, overwhelmed by the power of her words, her emphatic dramatization and the presence of real human beings in front of them. The next year, four Pacific Islanders and spoken word poets were selected from an international contest to perform at the 2015 UN Conference on Climate Change in Paris: Samoan American Terisa Siagatonu, Filipina Australian Eunice Andrada, John "Meta" Sarmiento from Guam, and Filipina American Isabella Avila Borgeson. Their countries are undergoing the worst effects of climate change. All of these poets present themselves as spoken word artists or poet-performers, that is, they not only write poetry but perform it in public events, bookstores or in professional videos. They have their own websites, which include the texts of their poems, accompanied by pictures, photos, videos and the recordings of their readings and performances. They can be contacted through chats, blogs, and emails. The political, educational, and activist intent of their art is declared from the way they introduce themselves. On the pages of their respective websites[3] they define themselves as: «poet, performer, educator» (Jetñil-Kijiner, n.d.); «poet, educator, community leader» (Siagatonu, n.d.); «poet, educator and cultural worker» (Andrada, n.d.); «poet/rapper» (Sarmiento, n.d.; he also offers thematic creative writing workshops). The eclectic Sarmiento has recently embraced two more professions as «boxing coach & personal trainer».

If poets from the Pacific region perform in the world of international politics, politicians in this area have also promoted the environmental cause by featuring in artistic documentaries or films. An example is Kiribati former president Anote Tong who featured in the prize-winning docufilm *Anote's Ark,* directed by Matthieu Rytz and premiered in 2018 at the Sundance Film Festival[4]. The film illustrates the impact of climate change on the archipelago of Kiribati, which will be one of the first countries on earth to entirely disappear underwater in the event of a sustained sea-level rise. This is not just a usual documentary listing a series of facts, graphs, and interviews. It is also a narrative. Two threads are intertwined: the story of a woman, who is eligible to emigrate to New Zealand from Kiribati, and that of the President, in both his official public role and from an everyday human perspective. The scenes featuring the woman offer an emotional representation of what being a climate refugee means. They show what she is losing in terms of cultural identity, affections, social connections, material and spiritual bonds. As in Jetñil-Kijiner's performance at the UN Summit, in *Anote's Ark* public and private overlap: *Anote's Ark* is non-fiction and fiction, it includes refined cinematography, pictorial natural images, and a plot

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3   Among them, Borgeson is the only one who does not possess a personal website.
4   For news about the documentary and its trailer, see the website (Rytz 2018).

with two interconnected threads. It is a hybrid genre, not just a cold documentary, telling the story of a land, a culture, a nation, and single individuals. It is a docufilm, but also a highly poetic visual representation of a land, its people, and its President.

The Concept of Transmedia

The examples I have just mentioned show how artistic expressions and politics collaborate and even overlap in the environmental emergency. They also show how, in the contemporary digital era, poetry has turned into a "transmedia genre", at least in the Pacific region. The adjective "transmedia" was first used by psychologist Marsha Kinder in 1991 to describe the way in which children learnt stories about the same characters (for example the *Mutant Ninja Turtles*) appearing in different media, formats, and digital platforms that were not coordinated: comics, graphic novels, illustrated books, animated cartoons, videos, TV series, films, videogames, toys, and gadgets (Bertetti 2020: 7). Children recognized the protagonists and settings, embracing them in a unified imaginary world.

It was media theorist and sociologist Henry Jenkins, however, who first talked about "transmedia storytelling" in a 2003 article published in the *MIT Technology Review*, to describe a process in which the integrated elements of a narrative are dispersed through different channels to create an entertaining and unified experience, and where each element contributes to the whole narrative structure:

> Let's face it: we have entered an era of media convergence that makes the flow of content across multiple media channels almost inevitable. […] In the ideal form of transmedia storytelling, each medium does what it does best — so that a story might be introduced in a film, expanded through television, novels, and comics, and its world might be explored and experienced through game play. Each franchise entry needs to be self-contained enough to enable autonomous consumption. That is, you don't need to have seen the film to enjoy the game and vice-versa. As *Pokemon* does so well, any given product is a point of entry into the franchise as a whole. (Jenkins 2003)

"Transmedia" is not the same as "multimedia", a word that in the 1990s defined the use of various communicative instruments (videos, written documents, audio files) coordinated on the same platform, as in a CD-ROM (Bertetti 2020: 19). It also differs from the concept of "intermedia", which refers to genres trespassing the boundaries of a single medium (and involving at least two media) and emphasizes the exchanges and transformation taking place in the passage. Adaptations, transpositions, and interdisciplinary artworks can be considered intermedia phenomena. "Crossmedia" is probably the term which is closest to "multimedia", that is, the spreading of content through different media platforms, without necessarily involving the idea of a narrative.

It is therefore mostly applicable to communication and marketing campaigns (Bertetti 2020: 20). Conversely, in the transmedia approach the contents are expressed through a variety of different separate channels and contribute to forming a unified narrative. Jenkins mentions several "transmedia products" that achieved an enormous commercial success, first using only one medium, then through several others. The stories of the British archaeologist Lara Croft in *Tomb Raider* started as a videogame, reproduced in many series, and were then turned into three films (the first two starring Angelina Jolie), printed comics and books, animated TV series, and gadgets. Other similar transmedia phenomena include *Pokemon*, *Indiana Jones*, *Star Trek*, *Lord of the Rings*, and *Star Wars* (Jenkins 2003). In his subsequent study *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (2006), Jenkins also explores the *Matrix* series, another transmedia work whose complex story cannot be unraveled only by a single medium (Bertetti 2020: 11).

In the course of time the transmedia logic has become more and more central not only in entertainment but in many other fields such as information, marketing, education, the record of cultural memory, and basically any type of communication. In a more recent study, *Spreadable Media* (2013), Jenkins, Ford, and Green concentrate on the potential of the "participatory environment" created by transmedia technology, which can favor not only broadcasting corporations, the media industry, and marketing agencies, but also non-corporate media producers, activist groups, churches, educators, non-profit organizations, and independent artists. They underline the passage from a culture based on the logic of broadcasting towards one fostering grassroots participation:

> The growth of networked communication, especially when coupled with the practices of *participatory culture*, provides a range of new resources and facilitates new interventions for a variety of groups who have long struggled to have their voices heard. (Jenkins, Ford, and Green 2013: xii; emphasis added)

The authors therefore record an emerging hybrid model of circulation of information and cultural products, a mix of top-down and bottom-up forces that determine the material that is shared across and among cultures. In their view the term «participatory culture» has evolved throughout time: from defining the cultural production and social interaction of fan communities, it now refers to different groups using media production and distribution to serve collective interests. The «spreadability» of media allows a new form of political and cultural participation (Jenkins, Ford, and Green 2013: 3). «Spreadability» is a key word in in this study. Jenkins et al. distinguish between the two concepts of «stickiness» and «spreadability». The former characterizes corporate media and their ability to discover content that attracts the audience's attention and activates engagement, so that it can be utilized for commercial purposes:

Applied to the design of a website, companies hope to achieve stickiness by placing material in an easily measured location and assessing how many people view it, how many times it is viewed, and how long visitors view it. Under the stickiness model, companies gain economic value by offering merchandise through some kind of e-commerce catalog, charging for access to information (through some kind of subscription or service fee), or selling the eyeballs of site visitors to some outside party, most often advertisers. (Jenkins, Ford, and Green 2013: 4-5)

Stickiness is therefore a concept to measure success in online commerce: the ability to keep audiences attached and a way to quantify them in order to exploit their potential as customers of products.

The spreadability of media, on the other hand, is their capacity to create content in easy-to-share format. The term refers to the pervasive force of media circulation and the technical and cultural potential they have for audiences who want to share content for their own purposes. Therefore, spreadability is a quality of the media that acknowledges the importance of social connections among individuals. Spreadability has lowered the cost of content distribution and political speech, and can motivate participation in the political process, serve activist groups, and help grassroots organizations to rise. This is why the authors define «civic media» those media that help circulation of content which increases civic engagement (Jenkins, Ford, and Green 2013: 219-224).

Jenkins, Ford, and Green also agree with activist and media theorist Stephen Duncombe that cultural and political communication should appropriate and remix elements of popular culture to appeal not only to people's head but also to their heart. In his *Dream: Re-imagining Progressive Politics in the Age of Fantasy* (2007), Duncombe criticized the rationalist language of the American Left, which appears exclusionary and cold, affirming that the contemporary cultural context could provide a model for a new type of activism, more spectacular and participatory (Jenkins, Ford, and Green 2013: 221; Duncombe 2007). The corollary of this view is that high-brow culture, academic research, political and militant speech should be more open to the forms and instruments of popular culture and entertainment in order to create that "participatory environment" the authors were talking about with reference to the potential of multimedia technology and transmedia communication: a lesson that Pacific poets and activists seem to have learnt.

Paolo Bertetti has summarized the seven basic principles of transmediality, defined by Jenkins in the MIT conference "Futures of Entertainment 4" and then re-elaborated in his blog (Jenkins, n.d.) highlighting the fact that they could be functional not only to an economic marketing logic but to the promotion of a symbolic, political, and cultural capital. They are: 1) spreadability vs. drillability; 2) continuity vs. multiplicity; 3) immersion vs. extractability; 4) worldbuilding;

5) seriality; 6) subjectivity; and 7) performance (Bertetti 2020: 71-75)[5]. The oppositional qualities of the first three principles are not mutually exclusive in transmedia productions and are simply a side of possible options. The first principle, for example, refers to the capacity of a transmedia project to involve audiences: *spreadability* is the capacity to reach the largest possible number of people through digital networks (extensive quality), while *drillability* is the capacity to stimulate the audience to investigate into the media content and catch all its complexity and details (intensive quality) — that is, to delve deep into a story at different levels. The second principle encompasses the capacity of a transmedia project on one hand to offer a coordinate and unified experience through different media platforms (*continuity*), on the other to prompt various imaginative story lines within the same continuous and coherent realm — that is, the construction of parallel or alternative stories, following a "what if?" attitude (*multiplicity*). The third principle underlines the impact of the transmedia product on everyday life: its ability to make the audience enter into the world of the story, even if briefly, suspending disbelief and forgetting their real-world circumstances (*immersion*), or its ability to provide elements (material or symbolic) that the audience can bring into their everyday life (*extractability*). *Worldbuilding* is the construction of vast narrative worlds, within which the single work is like a tile of a mosaic. *Seriality* is the capacity of transmedia projects to reproduce the same mechanism as that of eighteenth-century novels in instalments, namely appearing as segments of a whole, but in a hyperbolic way and across different media. *Subjectivity* is the multiplicity of views and dimensions that transmedia may offer — that is, presenting the story from different perspectives, according to different characters in different media. Finally, *performance* implies that the audiences of multimedia projects are not passive receivers but can interact with each other and can also participate, for example by expressing opinions, voting, and investigating cryptic clues that appear in a medium.

Some of these principles can also be found in Pacific performance poetry, as will be further explained.

Transmedia Environmental Poetry in the Pacific

Pacific performance poetry (whether dealing with environmental issues or not) appears in diverse formats and media. Some poets have authored collections in print. For example, Jetñil-Kijiner published *Iep Jāltok: Poems from a Marshallese Daughter* in 2017. Andrada wrote two collections: *Flood Damages* (2018) and *Take Care* (2021). Some of their poems can also be found in printed anthologies, on their websites, and in online poetry archives such as Poetry Foundation or Red Room Poetry. Other poets rely on the online media only. All of them circulate

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5   See also "Transmedia Journalism" (n.d.).

video-recorded readings or professional videos (including images and music), uploaded both on their websites and on YouTube. There can also be recordings of live readings in public events (like the participation of Jetñil-Kijiner at the 2014 COP). In the case of Sarmiento, besides his printed collection *Tie Your Shoes Kid* (2017), poetry mixes with music (mainly rap) in albums such as *Jungle Rules* (2023) and *Meta Mob* (2022) or the single *Go Back* (2019, with Sierra Lucia) and the EP *Nobody Knew* (2018)[6]. Videos of poetry readings, concerts, performances, and the video clips of his songs are also easily found on the web.

In the passage throughout all these multiple versions and media — a printed collection or anthology, an online archive, a professional official video, an unprofessional fixed-shot video of a reading, a video in a public event, a music CD — the text is necessarily subject to slight changes, a process which recalls the modalities of indigenous oral poetry (and oral poetry in general), but the incisiveness of the message remains and is reinforced by the diverse formats. Given the potential of transmedia communication, it is no accident that nations who are geographically and culturally marginalized from mainstream geo-politics, like Pacific islanders, have rapidly embraced the new and pervasive modality offered by the digital era. The visibility guaranteed by new media, the numerous possibilities of exchange and communication that the social platforms offer and the promotion of models of participatory culture, all these factors facilitate spreading the voice of those who need to be heard. As in a fan-club, the public can communicate with the author by mail from the website and follow the author's social accounts, which means the creation of a dynamic or user-generated content of the world that surrounds the author and his/her poetry as well as the participation in a virtual community of people sharing the same concerns, in this case the environmental emergency in the Pacific.

The possible direct connection of the audience with the author and his/her works without any filter, that is the absence of an intermediary (a publisher, a bookstore, a theatre, for example), follows the trend of digital society 2.0, based on the principle of disintermediation (Chadwick 2023), which can be found in the world of finance (with the removal of banks, brokers, or other third parties, allowing individuals to transact or invest directly), in information (with the so-called phenomenon of citizen journalism) but also in online shopping. Moreover, the web provides many other instruments to investigate the topic of Pacific environmental crisis: essays, articles, and reports. Docufilms such as *Anote's Ark* also provide a background for environmental poetry: a sort of framework that contextualizes the issue illustrated in single poems (for example, the effects of sea-level rise in Jetñil-Kijiner's "Dear Matafele Peinam"), connects it to present reality and, through evocative images, also conveys the indigenous cultural and mythical perspective.

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6   EP commonly stands for "extended play", a musical recording which is popularly understood as shorter than a full album.

Pacific Performance Poetry indeed seems to follow many of the transmedia principles illustrated by Jenkins et al., especially if we consider the theme of environmental emergency and its inflections by poets from different countries suffering from the same problems: not only *spreadability* is guaranteed by the enormous visibility given by the digital networks and the readers' interaction, but also *drillability*, as the stories narrated from different perspectives on the same issue allow the public to delve deeper into it. *Continuity* is provided by the fact that the effects of climate change in the Pacific region constitute a unified narrative, which also triggers the imagination to create a parallel world, the so-called "what if it happened to me, here?" effect (*multiplicity*). *Immersion* and *extractability* are found in the type of involvement produced especially by videos that enthrall the audience, but also connect them to everyday life. Different poems allow a diverse view to come out (*subjectivity*), but each represents the tile of a mosaic — that is, it contributes to *worldbuilding*.

An example of transmedia poetry project is the special number of *The Missing Slate* (2017) on "Pacific Islander Climate Change Poetry", which has been mentioned before. On the cover of the online journal is a highly suggestive detail of Pacific visual artist Joy Lehuanani Enomoto's painting *Nuclear Hemorrhage: Enewetak Does Not Forget*, (watercolor and thread, 2017)[7], inspired by the devastating nuclear tests in the Marshall Islands carried out by the USA in the atolls of Bikini and Enewetak between 1946 and 1958 ("The Nuclear Chain", n.d.). The circular cobweb of red threads (similar to blood vessels) running across a blue surface (the ocean) evokes the injured body of the personified ocean. There follows the table of contents and Santos Perez's "Guest Editorial" (*The Missing Slate* 2017).

Eight entries are included in the table of contents corresponding to eight poems by different authors. As in a hypertext, each entry is a link connecting to the poetic text, which is always accompanied either by an evoking painting/photo of a Pacific artist or by a video. Only one poem is recited in video without a script: Siagatonu's discursive performance of "Layers". Unfortunately, the images of the paintings and photos are no more visible on the website, probably due to the expiry of copyright, while all the videos can still be watched. The URL links to the paintings/photos that are still retraceable on the web are all provided here in the references. These are the journal's contents:

- "Dear Matafele Peinam", poem by Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner (text + official video);
- "The Caregiver's Story", poem by Evelyn Flores (painting *Manatu* by Dan Taulapapa McMullin + poem's text)[8];

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7   The detail is the bottom part of the painting, marked with the caption "nuclear hemorrhage detail" (Enomoto 2017).

8   See Taulapapa McMullin (2013).

- "Gaia", poem by Serena Ngaio Simmons (video + poem's text);
- "Basket", poem by No'u Revilla (complete painting *Hemorrhage* by Joy Enomoto + poem's text)[9];
- "Praise Song for Oceania", poem by Craig Santos Perez (video + poem's text);
- "At Palau Pacific Resort", poem by Emelihter Kihleng (photo *Entering the Unknown* by Syed Hassan Pasha + text)[10];
- "Layers", poem by Terisa Tinei Siagatonu (video);
- "Water Remembers", poem by Brandy Nālani McDougall (untitled photo by Mark Wyatt + text)[11].

In his editorial, Santos Perez underlines that Pacific Islanders' bond with the natural world, especially the ocean, and their belief in the inter-connection between all species are central factors of their culture:

> Over time, our ancestors developed complex societies in sustainable relationship with the environment. Pacific epistemologies teach us that humans, nature, and other species are interconnected and interrelated; that land and water are central concepts of native identity, community, and genealogy; and that the earth is a sacred ancestor and the source of all life, and thus should be treated with respect and reverence. (Santos Perez 2017)

The theme of oral tradition and indigenous mythology as a source of Pacific islanders' environmental consciousness is also a relevant aspect in the journal's poems together with the poets' outcry for the ecological disaster in the Pacific, as will be briefly illustrated below in the analysis of the selected works.

Jetñil-Kijiner's "Dear Matafele Peinam" opens the journal accompanied by its official video, available also on her website. The poem is a mix of material facts and lyricism, references to real events and expressions of intense emotion, scientific/formal language and the intimate/colloquial words of a mother telling her baby daughter about the possible dreary destiny of Pacific islanders, who risk losing their home and culture due to sea-level rise (Della Valle 2018a and 2018b). The video dramatically reinforces the content of the poem, read by the author's voice-over, and prompts the identification of the public with Marshallese people and all those countries affected by climate change. It begins with a shot of the poet on the foreshore from behind, watching the ocean: a mythical presence suspended between earth and sea. It is a figure that seems to be part of the environment and ecologically in tune with it: a symbol of what humankind should become. After that, Jetñil-Kijiner becomes a woman

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9   See Enomoto (2017).
10   The photo cannot be currently found on the web.
11   The photo cannot be currently found on the web. For other photos, see Wyatt (1979-2019).

in the flesh, strolling with her child along a beautiful lagoon, which might soon disappear under the sea. Throughout the video, scenes of natural beauty are juxtaposed to images of polluted water, brutally industrialized landscapes, waste heaps, sterile mining areas and territories devastated by hurricanes and floods. The poem conveys the promise of a mother who wants to defend her daughter's rights not to be a climate refugee. Frequent close-up shots of the chubby little girl depict her as another natural marvel. Jetñil-Kijiner's promise is not just theory. We see repertoire images of the poet participating in demonstrations, with many other protesters, activists, and people from civil society all over the world, carrying placards in the streets of the "First World". This time Jetñil-Kijiner watches the camera intently. The poem incites all the people who care to make their voices heard, to act, and to act now. The video closes in a circular way, with the same image as the beginning: a warning that the only path to follow is to become one with nature again, before it is too late.

In "The Caregiver's Story", Guam poet and scholar Evelyne Flores reports about a woman (the caregiver of the title) from one of the Chuuk islands[12], who is collecting plastic bags, not for ecological purposes but to send them to her relatives back home. They need the bags to carry the food they must now buy from stores, «because the ocean has crashed once more into the land / flooded the taro fields / they have no food / it will take two years for the salt to return to the ocean / and the garden become good again to grow taro» (Flores 2017). So, they have to go by boat to other islands to buy food, a trip that can last an entire day. Torn between the risk that those plastic bags may pollute the sea («the hungry ocean») and the pity for those humans starving («the hungry people»), she finally decides to give the woman all her bags. Dan Taulapapa McMullin's painting *Manatu* represents a leaning lofty historical building (from the Western world) about to collapse and sink into apparently black water, reflecting its image: an evocative representation of what could happen in the Northern Hemisphere, too.

"Gaia" is a monologue recited in video by Māori poet Serena Ngaio Simmons, who defines herself "poetry facilitator" for her involvement in teaching writing workshops across Hawai'i and New Zealand. She embodies a wrathful Gaia «Mother of lands and all encompassing / Terra, Haumea, Prithvi», who is summoning her children — Oceanus, Tsunami, Fire — to help her teach a lesson to ungrateful mankind: «Silly creatures / Nothing better to do than create havoc upon my skin / Having to heal new sores everyday is a nuisance and I am tired» (Ngaio Simmons 2017). Her offspring must act on her behalf. She «disemboweled crevices, releasing manifold demons», and now they must continue and finish her work of extermination until «the last corpse is seen floating» (*ibidem*).

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12 Chuuk Islands is a cluster of 16 much-eroded high volcanic islands in the Federated States of Micronesia, western Pacific Ocean. They are encircled by a barrier bank composed of some 85 sand and coral islets (*Encyclopedia Britannica* 2023).

Her collaborators will thus be turned into bright stars: a reminder of Gaia's wrath. Ngaio Simmons underlines the fragility and flimsiness of humans within the earth's ecological system. The video consists in a fixed shot of the poet reciting in a recording studio. The black circular frame around her, as if she was observed through a keyhole, gives a halo of technological mystery to the scene.

No'u Revilla's "Basket" goes to the core of the message conveyed by *The Missing Slate*. The poem describes a woman carrying a basket and showing its content to a «host». There are «earrings, mats, testimony» but, most importantly, there are «names» and «stories» in it (Revilla 2017). The basket turns into a metonymy for people, their culture and traditions, their songs and poetry. While «they» bring ships and bombs, the woman provides «medicine» for the ocean. «They» can be identified with the American government, since Revilla is a Polynesian poet and educator, born and raised in the island of Maui (Hawai'i); ships and bombs can easily be referred to the US militarization of many territories in the Pacific and their nuclear tests. The poem is dedicated to Jetñil-Kijiner, whose collection carries the reference to a basket in its title. "Iep Jāltok", in fact, means «a basket whose opening is facing the speaker» in the Marshallese indigenous language and is the way female children are defined. It also refers to the matrilineal society of Marshallese society (Jetñil-Kijiner 2017). Words, names, stories, and poetry are thus therapeutic for the injured body of the ocean, which is a living being not just an empty space. The poem is accompanied by Joy Enomoto's full painting *Nuclear Hemorrhage*, representing the mushroom-like shape of a nuclear explosion as a bloodshed from a body.

Finally, Santos Perez celebrates the resilience and energy of the Pacific region in his "Praise Song for Oceania" (2016): a long hypnotic prayer. The video consists in images of the ocean in all its possible shapes and meanings: waves in phosphorescent ripples, running up to merge into the beach sand; the blue mesmerizing underwater world inhabited by fascinating living beings (dancing schools of fish, corals, turtles, and dolphins); billows crashing against cliffs. The poet's voice-over recites a celebratory hymn to the sea, in which the phrase "praise your capacity" is repeated over and over again in different contexts: the capacity for birth, for renewal, to survive, to endure, to forgive, to bury, to remember. The sound of a constant breath seems to remind us how the Pacific Ocean is a huge lung for the whole earth.

Conclusion

To conclude, this brief exploration of environmental poetry in the Pacific shows the evolution of an indigenous genre that has undergone a transformation from oral to written and then to a transmedia modality in order to adapt to different conditions and take advantage of the potential of the new media. It also proves indigenous poetry to be still alive and kicking in its combination of

ancient wisdom and modern technology. Pacific poetry is a valuable instrument to educate about climate change, promote the rise of environmental consciousness and take a militant stand in the defense of the environment. It is a good practice that hopefully can inspire a south to north innovative philosophy. Most of all, Pacific environmental poetry reminds the world that Oceania exists and is in danger. And that this could be the destiny of many other sites in the planet, if measures are not taken. Pacific poets and artists, and Pacific Islanders in general, are willing to show their resilience, because, as Joy Enomoto says as a motto on her website: «They tried to drown us, they did not know we are the sea» (Joyenomoto, n.d.).

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