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Creative Practice and Pedagogy with the Marshall Islands: Navigating a Critical Call-and- Response

Abstract

This essay brings together creative practice and pedagogy centered on the Marshall Islands to examine how poetry and politics, used together as a critical call-and-response strategy, can contribute to the achievement of climate and nuclear justice for that country. The first part of the essay discusses my work-in-progress documentary film, Her Excellency, which focuses on the stories of women who are heads of state—in particular, the women I met and interviewed in the Marshall Islands in August 2018. The second part describes how I incorporated the film’s stories from the Marshall Islands into an ecomedia film course I taught in spring 2022. While the COVID-19 pandemic temporarily halted the film’s production, I continued my creative practice and research in the remote-learning classroom, where I established a spirit of co-inspiration with my ecomedia students. In the first half of a semester focused on the Marshall Islands, students critically and creatively considered what steps we can take to mobilize our support for the Marshallese people and for ourselves in the face of rising sea levels. Through their ecomedia projects on the Marshall Islands the students steered their audiences to navigate our entangled and problematic world, visualize our place in this world, understand the importance of feeling with islanders, and situate our lives in relation to the Marshallese. These connective relations matter to our mutual survival and mutual healing from the brutal acts of history so that we may forge paths toward livable presents and futures for all.

Keywords: *Marshall Islands, nuclear justice, climate justice, creative pedagogy, critical empathy, ecomedia, women leaders, feminist studies*

Introduction

In her poem “Tell Them,” Marshallese poet Kathy Jetnñil-Kijiner instructs friends who live elsewhere, to whom she has sent special gifts, that when others ask them about the items, they should say, “They’re from the Marshall Islands.”¹ Jetnñil-

Kijiner then indicates that she wants her friends to tell others about her atoll home and its people, so that the world may know more about them:

*Tell them we are descendants of
the finest navigators
in the world
Tell them our islands were dropped
from a basket
carried by a giant*

Near the poem's end, she writes:

*But most importantly you tell them
we don't want to leave
we've never wanted to leave
and that we
are nothing
without our islands.²*

Gifts allow us to hold a memory of the gift-giver. They also provide us with a springboard to tell a story or to pass the word. This poem reminds me of the gifts presented to me during my visit to the Marshall Islands in August 2018, while filming my current documentary project *Her Excellency*. The film tells the stories of women who are currently or have been heads of state in various countries around the world. For it, I interviewed President Hilda Heine, who served as president of the Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI) from 2016 to 2020. Heine was the first woman president of any Pacific Island nation, and in November 2023, she was elected president a second time. I also met with and interviewed women who were involved with the women's movement in the RMI since the 1980s and those who were familiar with President Heine's educational and political advocacy work.³ As is their custom, these women gave me intricately hand-spun earrings and necklaces made from the gifts of land and ocean—exquisite and magical, a portal to another cosmology. I was awed and humbled as the receiver. Likewise, through the art and craft of gift-giving I begin to share these women's stories; via editing digital images and sound recordings of them, I wove a reciprocal gift that will be remembered and can be shared. What story would I tell those who have not yet visited, or may never have a chance to visit, the Marshall Islands?

As an artist-scholar, my work examines the ways in which (post)colonial, diasporic, and multicultural societies represent themselves in various visual media. I focus on retelling, reviving, and reimagining their stories and histories, and

the impact these works have on their respective communities and nations. My films are often collaboratively produced with the aim of complicating discourses of (post)colonialism, decolonization, ethnography, diaspora, race, gender, and cross-cultural representation. In pushing the boundaries of the moving image as a medium, I experiment with the interplay between content and form, to inspire different kinds of viewing experiences, alongside thinking with the medium (e.g., its time-based, sonic, color, lighting, and/or framing aspects). In making *Her Excellency*, I challenge myself to find new aesthetic forms for the political-interview format, which is typically talking-head style. My current approach is to understand the uniqueness of each woman—how could doing so lead to formal innovations that go beyond the standard political interview? Before meeting with each woman, I conducted extensive research into their time in office and prepared guided questions directed at their political philosophy, social theory, and engagement with issues they are known for addressing. I asked each of them, including President Heine, where and how they would like to be interviewed, and what images they wanted included in the film. Collaborating with each interviewee on how she wants to be made visible engages these leaders on their own terms. Along with deep listening, in order to understand what the interviewees want to communicate to audiences, my work in the Marshall Islands included observing and connecting the environment to the women’s concerns poetically and symbolically.

The first time I shared *Her Excellency* as a work in progress was in January 2022, when I incorporated the Marshall Islands into a film studies course on ecocinema and ecomedia I was teaching at California State University, East Bay.⁴ While the COVID-19 pandemic temporarily halted film production, I continued my research in the classroom, where I established a spirit of mutual inspiration with my students. Working at a teaching university where more than sixty percent of students are the first in their family to attend college offers rich spaces for a creative pedagogy; I shared my research with my students as they learned about, and critically and creatively engaged with, real-life environmental issues including the pandemic and the climate crisis.⁵ I first introduced the students to a range of ecomedia works and readings on the Marshall Islands so that they could develop an awareness of the idea or myth of the “remoteness” of islands from a continental perspective. I encouraged them to undergo a personal geospatial reorientation in order to think about how they, in fact, do have ties to these “remote” territories; how we orient ourselves in the world; and how we find our place and role within the world.

In this essay, I bring together creative practice and pedagogy centered on the Marshall Islands to examine how poetry and politics, used together as a critical

call-and-response strategy, can contribute to the achievement of climate and nuclear justice for the Marshall Islands. I first describe how the content and form of *Her Excellency* attunes viewers to the challenges confronting women leaders in the RMI, especially given the country's long history of colonial violence through foreign militarization and the impacts of global climate change. My role as a filmmaker allows me to respond to and amplify the critical calls of these women's voices. I share their voices with my students, who learn and practice what it means to empathize with the Marshallese. Together, we consider what steps we can take to mobilize our support for the Marshallese people and for ourselves in the face of rising sea levels. This essay demonstrates how media ecologies of practice, viewing, and pedagogy can participate in maintaining a faculty for "long-distance empathy" and "critical empathy,"⁶ and how media ecologies do so amidst ongoing disruptions due to the climate crisis, a global pandemic, and calls to address colonial legacies and neoimperial structures.

***Her Excellency* in the Marshall Islands**

Her Excellency is a documentary film that focuses on several women political leaders. In it, I use a comparative and transnational approach to women's leadership experiences in order to offer a prismatic and interconnected view, as well as speculative possibilities for women leaders in the US. Over the past ten years, women have made up only six to seven percent of the world's national leaders. A 2022 UN report on sustainable development goals determined that at the current pace, "it [will] take another 40 years for women and men to be represented equally in national political leadership."⁷ *Her Excellency* takes an intimate look at the rare perspectives of women presidents and prime ministers and what it means to occupy the highest office in their respective nations as they grapple with climate crises, migration crises, the COVID-19 pandemic, nuclear justice, peace and conflict, decolonization, gender equity, and their relationships with superpower neighbors. At this writing, *Her Excellency* includes interviews with Tarja Halonen (president of Finland, 2000–12), Mary McAleese (president of Ireland, 1997–2011), and Torild Skard (president of the Norwegian Upper Chamber, 1973–77). The following discussion centers on my interviews with President Hilda Heine of the RMI.

In 2017, I was introduced to Pacific Resources for Education and Learning (PREL), a non-profit organization whose mission is to collaborate with "schools and school systems, families, community organizations, and government agencies to

transform education and promote dynamic reciprocal learning communities built on strong social and cultural capital.”⁸ PREL has offices in Hawai‘i, American Sāmoa, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, Guam, the RMI, the Republic of Palau, and the Federated States of Micronesia (Chuuk, Kosrae, Pohnpei, and Yap). A colleague who was working at PREL asked if I would be interested in interviewing then the RMI President Hilda Heine. Heine was the program director of PREL in Majuro, the capital of the Marshall Islands, from 2006 to 2011. Given the opportunity to interview President Heine, I continued my inquiry for *Her Excellency*: Does gender matter in how presidents lead their countries and negotiate with other countries? What does female leadership bring to the table that male leadership does not? In preparation for my interview with President Heine, I also considered what it means to enter a country’s history from the vantage point of its female leader.



Figure 1. Still from *Her Excellency* (work in progress), dir. Anita Chang. RMI President Hilda Heine giving her State of the Nation Address before the Marshall Islands Nitijela (parliament) in Majuro, August 6, 2018. Courtesy of the director

When cinematographer Tosh Tanaka and I arrived in the RMI, we collaborated with President Heine’s office to reach additional people to interview. We conducted interviews with Minister of Internal Affairs Amenta Matthew; Marie Maddison, director of Women United Together Marshall Islands; First Gentleman Thomas Kijiner; and Evelyn Joseph, the family and community engagement

specialist for PREL. As suggested by Heine's office, we first attended and recorded President Heine's State of the Nation Address at the Nitijela (parliament) in Majuro, the capital of the RMI. One static camera captured a wide shot of the proceedings, and also showed the male-dominated space of the Nitijela (Fig. 1). I personally operated another camera to capture medium- to close-up images of attendees in order to document their responses to Heine's address. The chamber was filled with religious leaders, members of the House of Chiefs, cabinet members, senators, mayors, diplomatic ambassadors, private and NGO sector representatives, youth representatives, and family members. In attendance were also choirs from Rongrong atoll, Aur atoll (where President Heine is from), and the Uliga district of Majuro. Her speech gave attendees an idea of the range of successes she and the government had had, issues they were addressing, and their goals to "improve livelihoods and advance RMI into the twenty-first century."⁹ Some of these included economic growth, international financial assistance, the US Compact Trust Fund that would end in September 2023, school truancy and drop-out rates, higher education opportunities and achievements, climate-change adaptations including renewable energy and sea wall projects, tourism development, support for vulnerable groups (children, women, disabled persons, and outer island communities), empowerment of women and girls, human trafficking, strengthening compliance to RMI laws, solid waste management, conservation and recycling, and water security.

In our interview, President Heine began by telling us that the RMI is

an island country that's located in the central western Pacific. We have twenty-nine islands, twenty-four of which have communities and have people settling on these islands. Currently, the population is about 53,000. That was [from] the last census. I believe that it's more than that [now], around perhaps 60,000 in the Marshall Islands.¹⁰

Of note, these islands of coral rings span 180,000 miles of the Pacific and are about 6.5 feet above sea level. Walking along the atolls, I am reminded how close the shorelines on either side are to one another. President Heine also acknowledged the diaspora: "We have about 20,000 to 30,000 Marshallese, who also live in the [continental] United States in various states, and also Hawai'i and Guam."¹¹ The out-migration of Marshallese is a result of complicated factors arising from, but not limited to, the US nuclear testing of sixty-seven bombs in the RMI from 1946 to 1958, resulting in the destruction of ecosystems and the health of the

Marshallese.¹² In addition to the impacts of nuclear testing, the climate crisis is another driving force behind the out-migration.

During our sit-down interview, held in the meeting room where she wanted to be filmed, I framed President Heine in a medium close-up shot that is intimate and not too distant. In the editing process, I allowed for longer shots of her speaking and reacting, thereby pushing the envelope of political interviews, which usually aim for informational sound bites and quick cuts of footage. These approaches engage my attempt to discover an alternative aesthetic for the political-interview format. As President Heine stressed in her State of the Nation Address, “an educated and healthy nation continues to challenge this government.” In our interview, she explained that she comes to political work with a commitment to education; she was an educator for thirty-six years, beginning as a classroom teacher before rising through the ranks to become a school administrator and then secretary of education. She realized that in order to make a difference in educational policies, and to put more resources into education, she needed “to be at the table where the resources are divided up.”¹³ She was also the first Marshallese to receive a doctoral degree—she has a PhD in education from the University of Southern California. She was then elected minister of education, serving for four years before being elected president.



Figure 2. Still from *Her Excellency* (work in progress), dir. Anita Chang. President Hilda Heine hosts President Tsai Ing-wen of Taiwan as they attend the “One Island One Product” handicrafts exhibit, Majuro, RMI, October 31, 2017. Courtesy of the director

Internationally, President Heine mainly speaks out on women’s empowerment issues and the climate crisis. Her lifelong emphases on education and health are interwoven with women’s empowerment, health, and safety. Listening to her and the other interviewees will bring into focus for the film the important roles of the RMI and Pacific Islander women regarding their social and political work—locally, nationally, and internationally—with gender equity and equality embedded in their efforts. A recent example is President Heine’s partnership with Taiwan President Tsai Ing-wen to create the RMI 50:50 Innovation Fund to provide “sustainable change for women and girls in the Marshall Islands through transformative project loans.”¹⁴ The project began in 2019 and aims to help women improve their family’s livelihoods; Presidents Heine and Tsai consider the fund groundbreaking. To illustrate this, I included footage of President Heine hosting President Tsai as they attend the “One Island One Product” handicrafts exhibit in Majuro on October 31, 2017 provided by President Tsai’s press office (Fig. 2). The image of two women heads of state in negotiation and cooperation, especially on gender-responsive actions to address gender inequities, stoked my imagination for a future of gender parity in national leadership. I hope my film’s viewers are similarly inspired.



Figure 3. Still from *Her Excellency* (work in progress), dir. Anita Chang. Marie Maddison introduces the Women United Together Marshall Islands (WUTMI) logo in the WUTMI office, Majuro, Republic of the Marshall Islands, August 6, 2018. Courtesy of the director

Our interview with Marie Maddison, director of Women United Together Marshall Islands (WUTMI), gave additional context to Heine's commitment to gender equality and equity. Maddison was a co-founder with Heine and others—including Carmen Bigler, the only woman elected to the congress of Micronesia, and Evelyn Kono, RMI legislator (1993 to 1997)—of WUTMI, a culmination of long-term grassroots activism not only for fair and equal treatment of women, but for socioeconomic and political issues leading up to Marshallese independence in 1979. These women earned bachelor's degrees from US academic institutions, rare at that time, and worked in education in the Marshall Islands. They were also active in the territory's political and economic future, particularly with political education—educating people about governance and voting, and advocating for women's work and involvement in politics.

In the film, I follow Maddison through the WUTMI office as she introduces the space where banners and posters from past projects are displayed, along with the radio broadcast station imparting important information to women and youth in Majuro. As she introduces us to the WUTMI logo, she explains that “the lady's wearing our traditional skirt and she's pounding on a pandanus leaf, which is used for handicraft to weave the society” (Fig. 3).¹⁵ A running theme through our interviews was re-defining the roles of women in political life as the RMI transitioned from a series of foreign occupations (Spain, Germany, Japan, and the US) to forming its own independent nation. As expressed by President Heine:

it's not expected [for] a woman to climb trees in the Marshall Islands. That's not something that is allowed in the culture. And so that's based on gender expectation here. But sitting in a parliament . . . the role of women and men in the parliament has not been something that's part of the culture. For that reason, I think we can make our way in terms of what is expected and who can do what in that institution.¹⁶

What would it mean for women in the RMI to “weave a society” in the twenty-first century? Getting more women into top government positions has certainly been a challenge. At the legislative level during the time of filming, only three of the thirty-three elected members were women, with usually one woman each term. President Heine believes that women, comprising fifty percent of the population, need to be part of the conversation. In her interview, she emphasized that women “have a very important stake in the development of this country. They

should likewise have the same voice in the development and policymaking of the country.”¹⁷

Meeting Amenta Matthews in August 2018, at that time the RMI’s minister of internal affairs, provided me with additional insight as to what female leadership brings to the table that male leadership does not. When Minister Matthews was elected to parliament in 2007, she was the first woman to serve as a minister in twelve years. She noted that President Heine made a concerted effort to appoint at least one or two women to cabinet boards. She also observed that President Heine demonstrates “more caring . . . for issues like education, issues for women and girls, domestic violence, the elderly . . . [She] sees the country as a whole” and “wants to improve the life of the people and the outer islands.”¹⁸ Other initiatives President Heine accomplished included the organization of the first Micronesian Women’s Conference—held in 2017 in the RMI—bringing together traditional and government women leaders from the Federated States of Micronesia, Guam, and the Republics of Kiribati, Nauru, and Palau. The purpose of the conference was to build strong alliances toward gender equality with a focus on five areas: ending violence against women and girls, realizing women’s economic empowerment, the empowerment of women in politics and decision-making, addressing the effects of climate change on women, and improving women’s access to health services.¹⁹ These types of alliances are also critical for international relations with larger organizations and nations.

Reflecting upon my question about what it means to be the only woman in parliament, Minister Matthews admitted that it can be difficult to be taken seriously and to get what you want. Despite this, she recalled that being a woman can be a key attribute when resolving disputes and conflict because respect toward women is embedded in Marshallese custom. According to Matthews and all my interviewees, in traditional Marshallese society, women are central figures in conflict resolution. They explained that in Marshallese, the phrase *lejmaanjuri* refers to women stamping on aggression in order to diffuse it. Minister Matthews said, “I always felt that when there’s a conflict, and physical conflict, that I will be the one to stand up and say ‘That’s enough.’ And men always listen. I didn’t think that I was not respected at all as the only woman in the parliament.”²⁰

The support of Marshallese women for women leaders was something all the interviewees emphasized as key to women getting into political office. This support from women is vividly recalled in “Campaigning in Aur” by Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner, a poem about when President Heine—Jetñil-Kijiner’s mother—was campaigning for the senate in 2011:

*After six hours on a ship, women
spill from the fiberglass mouth
of bubbling speedboats, women
in popsicle colored baseball caps and silk
guams, faded muumuus, and flowered
pohnpeian skirts, whooping, hollering, laughing
in the Aur water.*

*My mother is running for the Aur Atoll senator's seat.
Throughout all the elections, 32 senators elected
were men.
Throughout all the elections, only 1 senator elected
was a woman.*

*My mother knows the stakes
She knows the odds are slim
So she disembarks on her motherisland flanked
by a campaign army
of women.²¹*



Figure 4. Still from *Her Excellency* (work in progress), dir. Anita Chang. President Hilda Heine's opening remarks for the Climate Vulnerable Forum, November 22, 2018. Courtesy of the director

In our interviews in Taiwan conducted in 2017 before those in the RMI, some of the women legislators mentioned that many women pursue political

careers as single women because in Taiwan you rarely find men who would support their wives or partners through their political careers. Hearing the legislators' comments, I was interested in including the voice of a supportive spouse of a woman president. My meeting with First Gentleman Thomas Kijiner Jr. provided a contrast to the sentiments I had heard from the women. He emphasized the support he and President Heine gave each other while they both pursued and held political offices. Having grown up on an outer island of the RMI, in a community of fewer than 100 people, Kijiner stressed the importance of learning to live together, as every single person is important to the survival of the whole group and island. He conveys this reality of interconnectedness among island populations when discussing global warming and the climate crisis internationally. In our interview, Kijiner reminded us, "Despite our size, [the RMI has] been kind of punching way over our head globally, on the issue of climate change. We've been leaders in that forum."²²

While in office, President Heine led the Climate Vulnerable Forum (CVF) in 2018 and convened the first fully online forum that year (Fig. 4). The forum restated the commitments of and garnered additional support from fifty-eight nations toward climate action focused on the most vulnerable groups for the period 2018–2020.²³ For my documentary, I selected a clip of President Heine's opening address from the CVF informational video to emphasize the various forms of a president's highly mediated life in general. In it she states, "If warming goes above 1.5 degrees Celsius, our fate is sealed. But it's not too late if every nation steps up and does more by 2020. The Marshall Islands feels the grave weight of responsibility to assume the leadership of the Climate Vulnerable Forum at this crucial time."²⁴ And in her closing remarks, she pointedly asks, "If not us, who? If not now, when?"

In their individual interviews, President Heine and Minister Matthews discussed the "double whammies" that the Marshallese have dealt with and continue to deal with: the climate crisis and nuclear legacy. President Heine gently reminds us that these are "two threats that are not of our own making."²⁵ Due to the US detonation of sixty-seven nuclear weapons from 1946 to 1958, yielding as much radiation as 1.6 Hiroshima bombings occurring every day for twelve years, the Marshallese Islanders experienced direct and indirect health consequences such as reproductive, breast, lung, stomach, liver, and thyroid cancers; leukemia; diabetes; and women giving birth to "jellyfish babies"—babies born without bones and with transparent skin.²⁶ The twelve years of nuclear tests also destroyed island ecosystems, prompting an out-migration of the Marshall Islanders as many islands became uninhabitable. Ensuing health issues and access to adequate

treatment continue to be a multi-generational challenge for the Marshallese. In the late 1970s, the US government built a 350-foot-wide structure on Runit Island in Enewetok Atoll to contain “over 100,000 cubic yards of radioactively contaminated soil and debris [transported from other RMI locations] that were encapsulated in concrete (waste pile) inside an unlined nuclear test crater.”²⁷ While Runit Dome was originally intended to be a temporary containment measure, it seems, quite bleakly, to now be a permanent island fixture; it is referred to locally as “the tomb.” Residents are worried about Runit Dome, particularly as visible cracks have formed on the dome’s 358 concrete panels. With rising waters and intensifying storm surges, these fractures could expand, resulting in radioactive release and catastrophic damage. While the US Department of Energy has done periodic tests, the most recent report, in June 2020, concluded that

there are not data to suggest that the dome, or more specifically, the radioactive material encapsulated within the containment structure, is currently having a measurable adverse effect on the surrounding environment, or is expected to have any adverse effect on the environment in 5, 10, or 20 years.²⁸

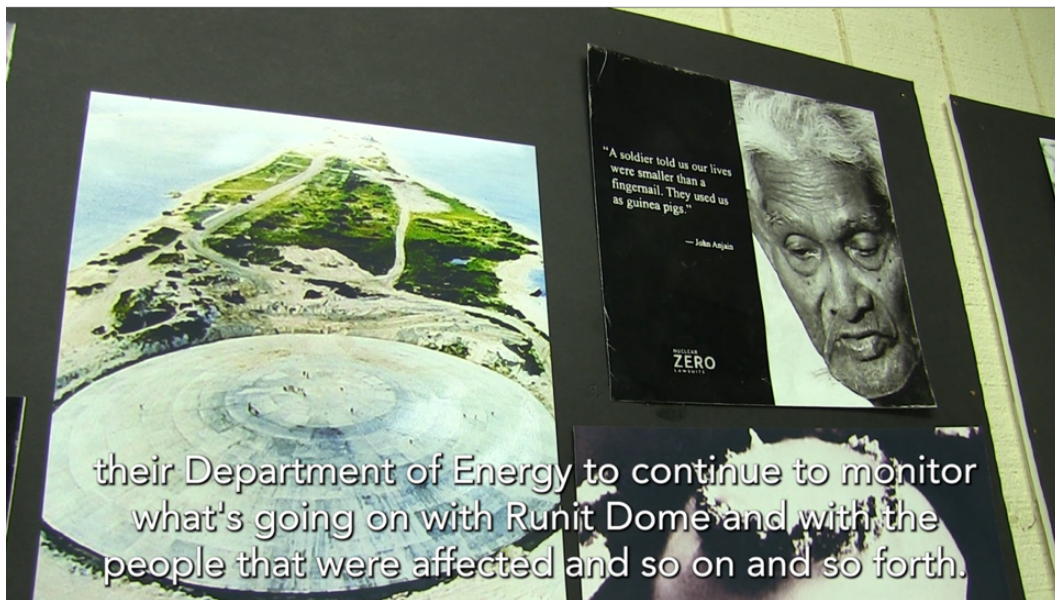


Figure 5. Still from *Her Excellency* (work in progress), dir. Anita Chang. Exhibits at the Alele Museum, Majuro, RMI, August 6, 2018. Courtesy of the director

The report also acknowledges the need to conduct a groundwater radiochemical analysis in order to determine if “forcing events” such as storm surges will affect the groundwater quality. In *Her Excellency*, the viewer hears President Heine discussing the US Department of Energy’s ongoing responsibility to monitor and deal with Runit Dome, as on the screen appears a display from the Alele Museum, Majuro, featuring an image of the dome alongside a quote by John Anjain, a survivor of the Bravo test and an anti-nuclear activist: “A soldier told us our lives were smaller than a fingernail. They used us as guinea pigs” (Fig. 5). The combination of these images and Heine’s interview segment emphasizes the enormous ethical responsibilities the US shoulders for generations to come.

Nuclear justice was an important platform for President Heine’s administration, which formed a National Nuclear Commission. It produced a report outlining a strategy for nuclear justice comprising of five pillars:

- (1) Full payment of all past and future awards of the Nuclear Claims Tribunal (Compensation);
- (2) Quality health care for all Marshallese (Health);
- (3) Reducing the risks of exposure to radiation and other toxins in the environment (Environment);
- (4) Building national capacity to monitor and understand radiation impacts (National Capacity);
- and (5) Education and awareness of our nuclear legacy (Education and Awareness).²⁹

Minister Matthews stressed the importance of this report to provide continuity of information for many years to come, as US lawmakers come and go while the nuclear legacy continues to be felt in the Marshall Islands and beyond.

The 1986 Compacts of Free Association are agreements between the US and the RMI, Federated States of Micronesia, and Republic of Palau that grant the US a military presence and activities in these areas in return for US security, economic assistance, and other provisions.³⁰ The Compact of Free Association between the US and RMI was set to expire at the end of 2023. Regarding the negotiation for its renewal, President Heine stated, “In order for us to move forward with anything, we have to get the support of the United States public behind anything that we want to do in this regard.”³¹

This sentiment was an important part of our interview with President Heine and was, for me, a critical call for support. I intercut this section of the interview with historical images of the nuclear tests exhibited at the Alele Museum in Majuro, along with their accompanying texts (Fig. 6). By doing so, I emphasize the importance of historical education for future paths and actions. The US Senate

Energy Committee Hearing on the Compact of Free Association Amendments Act took place on July 13, 2023, as I was writing this essay. Palau and the Federated States of Micronesia had signed new Compacts of Free Association with the US, while the RMI had yet to sign until a “‘dignified’ settlement of nuclear claims” was met in the new compact.³² This included many important questions of safety in the geographical areas affected by nuclear test contamination and waste. While monetary compensation was one component of negotiations, the Marshallese Senate Committee Statement delivered by Foreign Minister Jack Ading demanded timely, responsive, and just actions from the US to directly address the Marshall Islanders’ concerns.

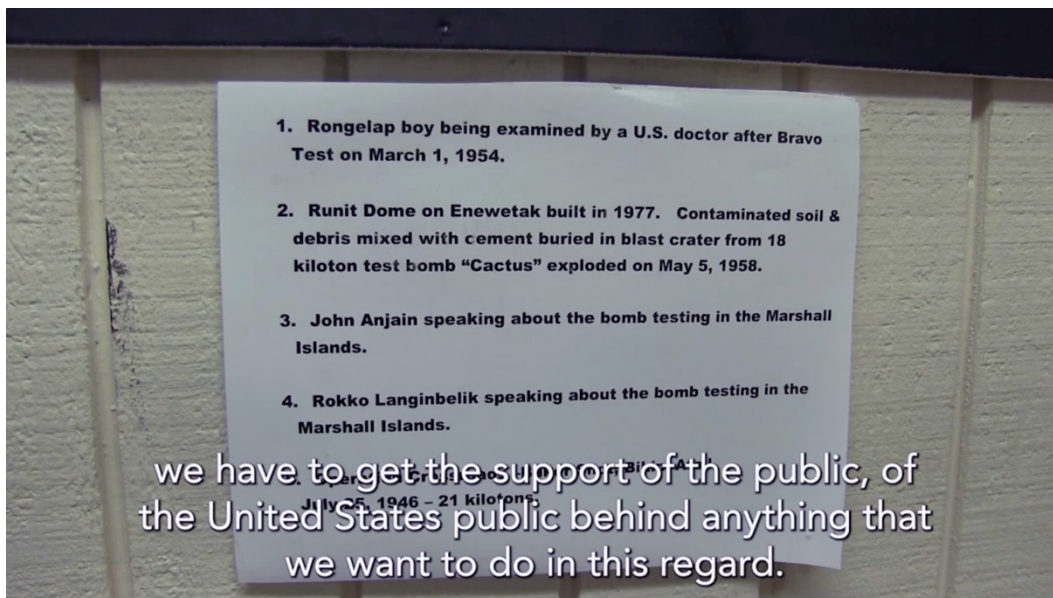


Figure 6. Still from *Her Excellency* (work in progress), dir. Anita Chang. Courtesy of the director

While the RMI signed the revised “compromised” compact on October 16, 2023, the struggle for nuclear justice continues. Depending on funding and scheduling, my film production could take me back to the RMI to interview President Heine in her second term and resume our conversation on the ongoing issues of nuclear justice and the climate crisis. Across spans of time and space, *Her Excellency* aims to capture moments in the lives of women leaders that present historical insights for the present. Interviews with each woman leader also offer creative and formal opportunities for the film. My research and interviews specific to

President Heine and the RMI context revealed a critical call-and-response not only for *Her Excellency* but also for my pedagogical practice.

Creative Pedagogy: A Critical Call-and-Response

While the COVID-19 pandemic put a temporary halt to the production of *Her Excellency*, and prior to producing a proof-of-concept video for *Her Excellency*, I brought my research into the classroom via an undergraduate ecomedia course I was teaching online at California State University, East Bay. In it, I shared my experiences visiting the RMI as well as the main concerns of the people I interviewed, particularly President Heine's emphasis on the critical importance of education and support from Americans needed in order for both the RMI and the US to move forward on issues of climate and nuclear justice. In response to her call for educating Americans, I designed the course so that its first half would focus on the Marshall Islands.

My ecomedia course focuses on the increasingly interdisciplinary discourse and multimedia production of film and video that address current ecological issues. Students also learn about the development of ecocinema theory, the legacies of earlier film and video that documented ecological issues, and the creative and critical ways they can engage with real-life environmental issues.³³ The course explores the following questions: What discursive, aesthetic, and technical strategies and interventions do these works engage in to raise awareness and inspire action on the issues they address? What enhancements to our senses can ecocinema and ecomedia offer? What can they show that we don't already know? What can they contribute to our knowledge? How can they make us better agents of change?

In spring 2022, my students and I explored a range of ecomedia works (i.e., multimedia journalism, documentaries, films, video poems, and poetry) on the Marshall Islands as a way to explore how different media forms visualize and tell the story of the Marshall Islands' fraught history with US nuclear weapons testing and, more recently, the climate crisis—both of which pose ongoing environmental challenges for the Marshallese. In addition to presentations of paired film and readings, students kept a weekly journal in which they reflected on and wrote about one of the films they had viewed, connecting it to one of the readings assigned with the film. Their journals helped them develop critiques about these representations and enabled me to guide in-class discussion.

In his nuanced book-length essay *Fear of Small Numbers*, globalization scholar Arjun Appadurai notes that the “growth in grassroots coalitions for change, equity, and health on a worldwide basis suggests that the human faculty for long-distance empathy has not yet been depleted.”³⁴ This idea prompted me to become interested in how media ecologies of practice, viewing, and pedagogy can participate in maintaining this faculty for long-distance empathy, and how they do so amidst ongoing disruptions due to the climate crisis, global pandemic, and calls to address colonial legacies and neoimperial structures. This online classroom was therefore designed as a creative laboratory for exploring “critical empathy,” debunking the myth of “isolation” and “remoteness” of islands, problematizing the term “Anthropocene,” and witnessing the reach of settler environmentalism and salvage environmentalism. Students learn to empathize with islanders who articulate how they feel with(in) the Anthropocene, question how they orient themselves in the world, and find their place and role within it despite and beyond virtual geographies.³⁵

For the course’s midterm assignment, I asked the students—working in small groups—to respond in a call-and-response fashion to the following prompt:

In a globalized world and living in the US, a country [that] arguably has committed crimes against humanity—here, in the case of nuclear tests in the Marshall Islands—how can we understand that our existences are bound together with the peoples of the Marshall Islands? This midterm will involve the Marshall Islands, and you may approach your project in one or more of the following ways: 1) Every March 1st is Nuclear Victims Remembrance Day for the peoples of the Marshall Islands. It was formally known as Nuclear Victims’ Day and Nuclear Survivors’ Day. Last year, the National Nuclear Commission, Republic of the Marshall Islands put out a call for short videos: “Show your solidarity and remind us Marshallese that we are not alone in our pursuit of nuclear justice. Reflect on our shared efforts to uplift and provide comfort to one another”; 2) A strategic campaign for awareness and action; 3) A personal reflection of the nuclear and climate crises that the Marshallese have and continue to endure.

For their response, I asked students to use concepts and themes they had learned in the course to produce an ecomedia work or sketch taking the form of a short video, music, soundscape, rap, photography, poetry, performance, meme, drawing, poster, and/or painting. In an accompanying essay, they were required to include concept(s) introduced in the course readings—such as decolonizing the

Anthropocene, occupation as trusteeship, and settler environmentalism—that addressed critical decolonial approaches to climate change, colonialism, and global capitalism.³⁶ They were instructed to also include concept(s), themes, and aesthetic strategies they had learned from their study of videos, films, and course readings, and explain how these informed and inspired their creative and communication approach to their ecomedia work.

The students demonstrated their critical understanding of course material and engaged in a call-and-response through the creative process to explore and put into practice not only long-distance empathy, but what it means to empathize or feel *with* the Marshallese as eloquently expressed by Salma Monani:

Sympathy, as primarily a concern *for*, is motivated not necessarily by a sense of sharing but instead by a sense of charity. While altruistic, charity signals a sense of concern that is hierarchical in nature, and inherently patronizing. In contrast, empathy, which is tied to sharing feelings, hints at an altruism that is more grounded in a sense of equality. When acting from empathy, I do what I do because I've taken on your perspective; your pain is my pain; your joy is my joy. Because I find myself suffering and/or experiencing as I think you do, I have put myself on a similar plane as you.³⁷

Each student presented a unique engagement of feeling with the Marshallese and the pursuit of nuclear justice. Some points of identification were factors that shaped student empathy, such as being Pacific Islanders themselves or having a US-military affiliation. In the end, the reverberating effects from Heine's critical call on the importance of education—needed in order for both the RMI and the US to move forward on issues of climate and nuclear justice—could be felt and heard in our ecomedia classroom, my students' works, and my film.

The student works were powerful and I, along with my two research assistants, selected some for an online public exhibition titled *An Evening of Poetry and Politics: The Marshall Islands and Her Excellency Hilda Heine*.³⁸ The event included two discussants: Ariana Tibon from the RMI National Nuclear Commission and Dr. Maria Ortuoste, a professor of political science at California State University, East Bay. Some questions we wanted to explore in the event were how can poetry, visual art, and politics contribute to the achievement of climate and nuclear justice for the Marshall Islands, and what steps can we take to mobilize our life support for the Marshallese people and for ourselves in the face of rising sea levels?

Along with *Her Excellency*, my work-in-progress video, the exhibition showcased student poetry including "To the People of the Marshall Islands" by

Brooklyn Aguilar, Alexandria Sepulveda, and Adriana Fimbres; “I am a Journalist and I am Here” by Alexis Peck; and the trilogy “A Need For Change” by Francisco Cortez Mendoza, “At the End” by David Oronos, and “Plucked from the Soil” by Lyanne Nisperos. The exhibition also included *Tell Them: A Video Poem* by Nang Hlaing, as well as two memes about Runit Dome created by Cindy Kim. In the following section, I will focus on three of these exemplary works: the video poem *Tell Them*, the Runit Dome memes, and the poem “At the End.”

Tell Them

Nang Hlaing co-produced the three-minute video *Tell Them* with classmates TJ Luke and Gladys Gonzales, and directed the video herself. Hlaing, originally from Myanmar, was then a senior majoring in communication. Taking its title from Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner’s poem of the same name, *Tell Them* is divided into two contrasting parts. The first is a montage of slow-motion, black-and-white, archival images sourced from YouTube of the US military’s 1946 Operation Crossroads nuclear testing on Bikini Atoll of the Marshall Islands. The aerial and ground-level footage shows silent blasts, with billowing, emanating, and falling plumes filling the frame, at times looking like spectacular clouds of cotton balls that belie the unimaginable debris of death left in their wake (Fig. 7). These images accompany Hlaing’s softly-spoken narration:

These cluster of dots on the map lies a nation, the Marshall Islands. On these islands live the strong and tough Marshallese. Even after decades of injustice and exploitation by our American government, they remain resilient. Their home displaced. The elders battle with cancers. Their babies born with defects. They remain. That is their home. That is their land. That is their history. We had destroyed all that was dear to them with our nuclear testing. Yet, our government remains in denial, denying responsibilities and assistance while the majority of Americans remain ignorant. For that, we are truly sorry. To all the Americans. Let’s spread this message. Tell your friends and families. Tell them about the nuclear testings. Tell them about the beautiful shores of the Marshall Islands. Tell them about the strength of the Marshallese. Tell them to stand for injustice. Tell them to push congress to take responsibility. Tell them we could do better. Let us stand together with the Marshallese. Let us stand against injustice.³⁹

As the narration concludes, soft instrumental music is heard along with the sounds of rushing water. This leads into the second part: a color montage of contemporary aerial images of the shore and atolls, including Marshallese children and youth walking to school, youth learning about fishing nets from teachers, island street life, and a woman sitting in front of a United States Postal Service office. The images are overlaid with string-band music with sung lyrics listing the names of islands within the RMI.

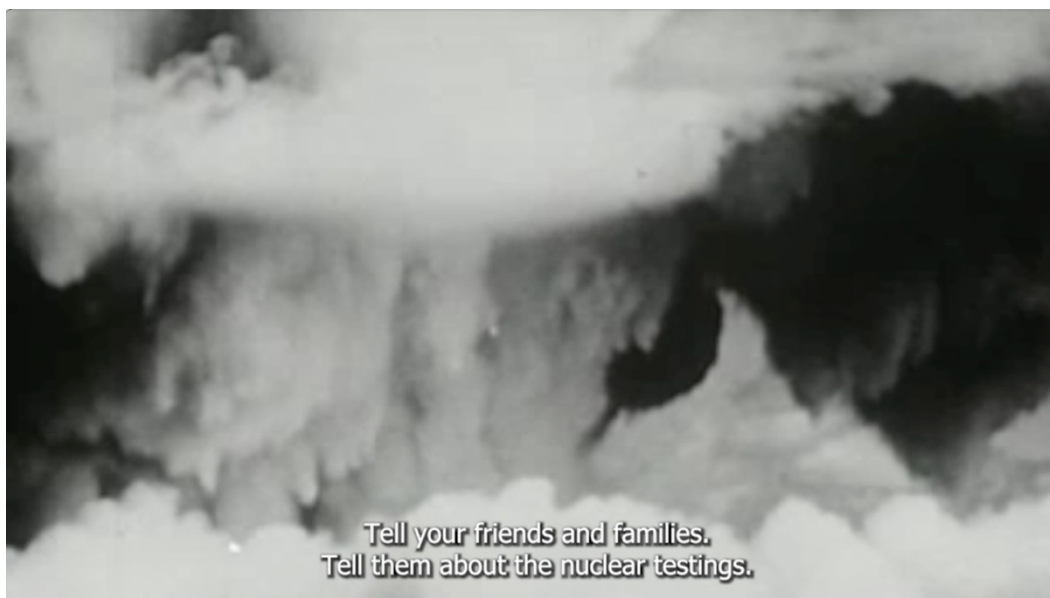


Figure 7. Still from *Tell Them: A Video Poem*, dir. Nang Hlaing, 2022. Courtesy of the directors

In her accompanying essay, Hlaing explained that she was personally inspired by Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner’s poem in the video *Anointed* (2018, directed by Dan Lin), Ursula Biemann’s soft voiceover delivery in her video-essay *Deep Weather* (2013), and Bruce Conner’s visual style in his short film *Crossroads* (1976). By slowing down the explosions, she believed it would “imprint the message into viewers’ minds” and “show remorse and empathy toward the Marshallese.” For the contrasting second part, Hlaing writes that she and her peers did not want to “emphasize solely the devastation of nuclear testing, [rather] the emphasis is to turn to the vibrancy and continuation of life in the Marshall Islands.” She used found footage from the internet, inspired by Cauleen Smith’s film *Song for Earth and Folk* (2013). Here, the cheerful music was left on its own, without narration, to emphasize “joy and optimism.”⁴⁰

During the event's discussion, Hlaing explained that she made this video to shed light on this part of US and Marshallese history, of which she had not previously been aware, and she believes more people should be made aware of through the education system. She said, "I'm not American by birth, but even though my husband [was] born in America and he worked in the US Department of Defense, he didn't even know the extent of the [damage] that was done in the Marshall Islands." For discussant Maria Ortuoste, *Tell Them* showed that "this dire thing might be happening, but we're living. And it's not just an existence, and we are doing our best to live our culture and have fun, have fun while going through it, and which is, I guess, the essence of thriving for a group of people." Discussant Ariana Tibon added that every March 1 is Remembrance Day, a national holiday in the RMI to remember and honor the survivors and victims of the US nuclear tests, and that the use of the words "survivors" or "victims" in its name continues to be debated even at the level of parliament.

As she depicted in *Tell Them* in the second half of the video, Hlaing agreed that a show of strength is also important; she thought about her Myanmar homeland after the military coup and how people there are fighting and not just surviving. Ortuoste added that even if "one is not on the frontlines of a revolution, just surviving day-to-day and having that sort of spirit is strength in itself."⁴¹ The discussion reminded me of the discursive nuances in survivorship and victimhood depending on the nature of violent event(s), the duration of a conflict, ensuing trauma, the haunting effects of violence, and, ultimately, the needs of articulating these experiences for those who survived such horrors.

Runit Dome Memes

A daily reminder of the US nuclear weapons tests on the Marshall Islands is the Runit Dome, a concrete dome described above that contains more than 3.1 million cubic feet of radioactive material from past nuclear tests—the equivalent of thirty-three Olympic-sized swimming pools.⁴² While the 2020 US Department of Energy inspection report quoted above noted that there were no "measurable adverse effects" in the foreseeable five to twenty years, many Marshallese would like an independent review as part of their nuclear justice platform. To address the magnitude of the Runit Dome and the multitude of environmental issues it poses, Cindy Kim, a graduate student in communication at the time of the event, created two memes that pointedly reflect on the dome (Figs. 8–9). They remind viewers of the war machine's unfathomably destructive impact on the environment and

stress the importance of both holding accountable those who were and are responsible for the Runit Dome's existence and mitigating its ongoing dangers. In her memes, Kim used phrases and statistics from the 2020 report to make sure they were "grounded in reality [rather] than just an aesthetic artifact." Kim's main aim was to "make information more accessible and consumable to different audiences online as an entry point [for] those who might not know anything at all about the US history of nuclear detonation in the Marshall Islands."⁴³

US government: *slaps roof of Runit Dome* this bad
boy can fit so much more than 3.1 million cubic feet of U.S.-produced radioactive soil and debris, including lethal amounts of plutonium in it



Figure 8. Cindy Sung Yun Kim, *Runit Dome Meme 1*, 2022. Courtesy of the artist

In *Runit Dome Meme 1*, two graphically illustrated government officials and/or contractors stand in the foreground of an iconic aerial photograph of the Runit Dome (Fig. 8). The man in a suit is positioned so that his right hand is hovering over the top of the Dome in a casual matter-of-fact gesture. This symbolizes the US government's attitude of disavowal toward the gravity of the nuclear and biological weapons waste contained within, particularly since the US has no apparent plans for permanent clean-up of the waste.



Figure 9. Cindy Sung Yun Kim, *Runit Dome Meme 2*, 2022. Courtesy of the artist

This skirting of responsibility is further commented on in *Runit Dome 2*, which emphasizes the fact that the nuclear waste in Runit Dome was created by the US (Fig. 9). The skidding of the car indicates how quickly and obviously the US does not want to face the challenges of its responsibilities. The skillful humor embedded in both of these memes opens up space for critical reflection. Both are searing commentary on the enormity of the devastation and the lack of true will on part of the US government to bear the full consequences of radiological damages that extend beyond the temporary containment site. Participants in the event's online discussion responded favorably to the memes; Maria Ortuoste noted that artistic expressions "are usually more powerful than just political speeches . . . because [they evoke] the humanity of people and that's what gets people to change."⁴⁴

"At the End"

Globally, the legacy of nuclear testing haunts everyone, and none more than the Marshallese. David Oronos's poem "At the End" bespeaks the rippling effects of

its violence and the resulting trauma felt on the Marshall Islands and other island communities whose identities and sustenance come from their ocean worlds. Oronos is of Chamoru and Filipino descent, and was a senior majoring in communication at the time of the event. Introducing his poem, he explained, “When I wrote it, I imagined an island by itself, alone, left behind, stripped of its people.” In his accompanying essay, he expressed that his sources of inspiration were the stories of survivors from the nuclear testing’s fallout in the documentary *Nuclear Savage: The Islands of Secret Project 4.1* (2011) and Jetñil-Kijiner’s poems.⁴⁵ Of the latter he wrote, “She invokes the voice of her people, their anger, their pride, and their way of life. I didn’t want to copy her style of poetry, but I tried to capture the same urgency and emotional connection.”⁴⁶ Oronos stated that his creative work also responded to how the 2017 essay “On the Importance of a Date, or Decolonizing the Anthropocene” by Heather Davis and Zoe Todd brings attention to the violence of the Anthropocene when explicitly linked to the beginnings of British colonization in 1610. Davis and Todd state that

linking the Anthropocene with colonization . . . draws attention to the violence at its core, and calls for the consideration of Indigenous philosophies and processes of Indigenous self-governance as a necessary political corrective, alongside the self-determination of other communities and societies violently impacted by the white supremacist, colonial, and capitalist logics instantiated in the origins of the Anthropocene.⁴⁷

Oronos’s poem “At the End” refers to the “poison”—a reality as much as it is a symbol of ongoing violence—that will not go away, and yet despite this “poison,” the island in his poem continues to call for the reader to yearn to “come home” and to “not lose the way.” “The way” metaphorically refers to Indigenous philosophies and perhaps “processes of Indigenous self-governance.”

Finally, Oronos’s poem practiced what Craig Santos Perez writes about in his article “Thinking (and feeling) with Anthropocene (Pacific) islands.”⁴⁸ In his accompanying essay, Oronos writes, “Santos Perez comments about how it is not enough to just think about the Anthropocene from the island perspective, but we need to feel as well. Pacific Islanders are not just victims and not entirely innocent either. More importantly, they have stories to tell the world and that was a concept I wanted to portray.”⁴⁹

"At the End"

*Come home, my children.
Come home, before I slip away,
Into the dark.*

*Come closer, my children.
Come be with me
At the end.*

*Each day, I lose more
Each day, I sink further
Into the deep.*

*The tides rise.
The tides will wash away
All the scars.*

*The poison remains.
The poison they tried to forget
In waters.*

*Why do they persist?
Why do they pursue the end
Of the world?*

*Here we were family.
Here we told our children's stories
Of the past.*

*Will they have a future?
Will they touch their feet
To the sand?*

*Do not cry for me.
Do not mourn the fate
Of the lost.*

*Remember my story.
Remember so that you may
Tell the world.*

Come home, my children.

*Come home and promise not to
Lose the way.*

*Come closer, my children.
Come be with me
At the end.⁵⁰*

After Oronos's reading, Ariana Ribon imagined that the jellyfish babies (among the many victims of the nuclear weapons tests) who have passed away are "wanting to be near the[ir] mother[s]." ⁵¹ Tibon also reminded the event's participants and audience that Marshallese women led the nuclear justice efforts from the very beginning; they were early activists who criticized the nuclear weapons tests because they were giving birth to jellyfish babies due to the radioactive contamination in the water. One of President Hilda Heine's five pillars of nuclear justice described above is "Education and Awareness." A member of the National Nuclear Commission, Tibon explained that the nuclear legacy in the Marshall Islands is now part of their K-12 educational curriculum after seventy-three years of omission.

Conclusion

Throughout her work in education and politics, President Hilda Heine has promoted women's organizations, women's rights, and the importance of women being active in the community and in the government. In interviews for my documentary, Marie Maddison spoke of the need for an education system that is relevant for the Marshall Islands today, and Evelyn Joseph spoke of the significance of place-based education, as well as what it means to be a global citizen. Indeed, the women featured in *Her Excellency* advocate for a critical pedagogy—one that is relevant to where one is located and that builds relationships across distance, a factor critical to mutual survivability. Along with being a filmmaker who responds to and amplifies the critical calls of these women, I also share them with my students in the classroom.

Although my ecomedia course of spring 2022 was held virtually, the class gathered like a think tank and, amidst the climate crisis and global pandemic, critically navigated the media ecologies of practice, viewing, and pedagogy. We mediated histories and stories from the Marshall Islands, which served as our guides.

Our creative pedagogy involved a critical call-and-response approach to specific ecomedia representations of Marshallese life, and the written words and voices of Marshallese educators, feminists, politicians, community activists, and poets. Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner's poems were a steady inspiration for my students. In her words, the Marshallese are "descendants of the finest navigators in the world" and their stories—told through the sights and sounds of poetry, music, video poems, memes, experimental films, and documentaries—enable critical awareness and long-distance empathy for continued dialogue, knowledge-building, and action toward achieving nuclear and climate justice for the Marshallese.⁵² Undoubtedly, ecomedia representations of the Marshall Islands steer their audiences to navigate our entangled and problematic world and to visualize our place in this world. They present opportunities for audiences to understand the importance of empathizing and feeling with islanders, and of situating our lives in relation to the Marshallese. Knowing that these connective relations matter to our mutual survival and mutual healing from the brutal acts of history, we are able to forge paths toward livable presents and futures for all.

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Notes

¹ Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner, *Iep Jāltok: Poems from a Marshallese Daughter* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2017), 64–5. See also https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w9D88ST9qbw&t=15s&ab_channel=StudioRevolt.

² Jetñil-Kijiner, 66–7.

³ Anono Liem Loek and Marie Madison, “Women’s Organizations,” in *Life in the Republic of the Marshall Islands*, eds. Anono Liem Loek, Veronica C. Kiluwe, and Linda Crowl (Majuro, Marshall Islands: University of the South Pacific, 2004), 82–100.

⁴ The course focused on the growing discourse about and production of ecocinema and ecomedia—increasingly interdisciplinary and created across multiple media platforms—as well the legacies of film and video to document, construct, and present themes that address (both directly and indirectly) the ecological issues of their times.

⁵ The course was taught online with twenty-five undergraduate students. Most were majoring in communication, with others majoring in art, biological sciences, human development, and English.

⁶ Arjun Appadurai, *Fear of Small Numbers: An Essay on the Geography of Anger* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006); Salma Monani, “Evoking Sympathy and Empathy: The Ecological Indian and Indigenous Eco-activism,” in *Moving Environments: Affect, Emotion, Ecology, and Film*, ed. Alexa Weik von Mossner (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2014), 225–47.

⁷ “Achieve Gender Equality and Empower All Women and Girls,” United Nations, July 7, 2022, <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2022/Goal-05/>.

⁸ “About Us: Our Mission & Vision,” Pacific Resources for Education and Learning, accessed August 5, 2023, <https://prel.org/about/>.

⁹ President Hilda Heine, “State of the Nation Address,” August 6, 2018.

¹⁰ President Hilda Heine, in-person interview with author, August 7, 2018.

¹¹ Heine, interview.

¹² Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner and Hilda Heine, “Displacement and Out-Migration: The Marshall Islands Experience,” Wilson Center, September 30, 2020, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/displacement-and-out-migration-marshall-islands-experience>.

¹³ Heine, interview.

¹⁴ Heine, “State of the Nation Address.”

¹⁵ Marie Maddison, in-person interview with author, August 6, 2018.

¹⁶ Heine, interview.

¹⁷ Heine, interview.

¹⁸ Amenta Matthews, in-person interview with author, August 7, 2018.

¹⁹ “Micronesia Women’s Conference: It’s Time for Substantive Action,” Pacific Community/Communauté du Pacifique, August 11, 2017, <https://www.spc.int/updates/news/2017/08/micronesian-womens-conference-its-time-for-substantive-action>.

²⁰ Matthews, interview.

²¹ Jetñil-Kijiner, *Iep Jāltok*, 60.

²² Thomas Kijiner, in-person interview with author, August 7, 2018.

²³ “Members,” Climate Vulnerable Forum, accessed August 5, 2023, <https://thecvf.org/members>.

²⁴ “CVF Summit Announcement,” Climate Vulnerable Forum, June 24, 2018, <https://youtu.be/YBOM2hCFvpl>.

²⁵ Heine, interview.

²⁶ See <https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2020/world/hiroshima-anniversary-nuclear-testing>; Lijon Eknilang, “Learning from Rongelap's Pain,” *Seattle Journal for Social Justice* 2, no. 1 (2003): 317–8; Neal A. Palafox, David B. Johnson, Alan R. Katz, Jill S. Minami, and Kennar Briand, “Site specific cancer incidence in the Republic of the Marshall Islands,” *Cancer* 83 (1998): 1821–4, [https://doi.org/10.1002/\(SICI\)1097-0142\(19981015\)83:8+<1821::AID-CNCR30>3.0.CO;2-5](https://doi.org/10.1002/(SICI)1097-0142(19981015)83:8+<1821::AID-CNCR30>3.0.CO;2-5).

²⁷ “Report on the Status of the Runit Dome in the Marshall Islands,” United States Department of Energy, June 2020, 2, <https://www.energy.gov/sites/prod/files/2020/06/f76/DOE-Runit-Dome-Report-to-Congress.pdf>.

²⁸ “Report on Runit Dome,” iii.

²⁹ “Nuclear Justice for the Marshall Islands: A Strategy for Coordinated Action FY2020-FY2023,” Marshall Islands National Nuclear Commission, 2019, 3, <https://rmi-data.sprep.org/system/files/RMI%20NNC%20Strategy%202019.pdf>.

³⁰ “The Compacts of Free Association,” Congressional Research Service, accessed August 5, 2023, <https://crsreports.congress.gov>.

³¹ Heine, interview.

³² Jack Ading, “Statement of the Honorable Jack Ading, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade Republic of the Marshall Islands, Before the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources,” July 13, 2023, <https://www.energy.senate.gov/services/files/D364FEFC-C2F2-4CE1-94A3-057BDE98A584>.

³³ Kiu-Wai Chu aptly describes ecocinema as an “interplay among film, ecology, and the human mind.” Kiu-wai Chu, “Ecocinema,” in *Oxford Bibliographies: Cinema and Media Studies*, accessed January 30, 2024, <https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780199791286/obo-9780199791286-0252.xml>.

³⁴ Appadurai, *Fear of Small Numbers*, 41.

³⁵ The following are part of the course reading list containing the main concepts students learned in the class: Aimee Bahng, “The Pacific Proving Grounds and the Proliferation of Settler Environmentalism,” *Journal of Transnational American Studies* 11, no. 2 (2020): 45–73; Heather Davis and Zoe Todd, “On the Importance of a Date, or, Decolonizing the Anthropocene,” *ACME, an international e-journal for critical geographies* 16, no. 4 (2017): 761–80; Elizabeth DeLoughrey, “The Sea is Rising: Visualising Climate Change in the Pacific Islands,” *Pacific Dynamics*:

Journal of Interdisciplinary Research 2, no. 2 (2018): 185–97; Jaimey Hamilton Faris, “Sisters of Ocean and Ice: On the Hydro-Feminism of Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner and Aka Niviâna’s *Rise: From One Island to Another*,” *Shima Journal* 13, no. 2 (2019): 76–99; Epeli Hau’ofa, “Our Sea of Islands,” in *We Are the Ocean: Selected Works* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2008), 27–40; Monani, “Evoking Sympathy and Empathy”; Craig Santos Perez, “Thinking (and feeling) with Anthropocene (Pacific) islands,” *Dialogues in Human Geography* 11, no. 3 (2021): 1–5.

³⁶ Other concepts engaged were: ecocinema, ecocritical perspective, ecology as ideology, immersive filmmaking, model of cinema (film-earth relationship, film world, film experience), the Anthropocene, the Capitalocene, the Plantationocene, the Chthulucene, decolonizing nature, Anthropocene islands, green/blue-washing, environmental debilitation, occupation as trusteeship, settler environmentalism, mapping abundance, myth of isolates, salvage environmentalism, and feminist hydro-ontological imaginary.

³⁷ Monani, “Evoking Sympathy and Empathy,” 277.

³⁸ “An Evening of Poetry and Politics,” Anita Chang Works (website), accessed June 6, 2024, <https://anitachangworks.com/2022/05/21/an-evening-of-poetry-and-politics/>. As of the writing of this essay, these works are part of a window installation, “Thinking and Feeling with the Marshall Islands,” for the Manifest Differently Project, Artist Television Access, San Francisco, California.

³⁹ Nang Hlaing, *Tell Them: A Video Poem*, 2022.

⁴⁰ Nang Hlaing, “Midterm Paper Analysis on Video Poem ‘Tell Them’” (California State University, East Bay, 2022), 4–5.

⁴¹ “An Evening of Poetry and Politics.”

⁴² Susanne Rust, “How the US Betrayed the Marshall Islands, Kindling the Next Nuclear Disaster,” *Los Angeles Times*, November 10, 2019, <https://www.latimes.com/projects/marshall-islands-nuclear-testing-sea-level-rise/>.

⁴³ “An Evening of Poetry and Politics.”

⁴⁴ “An Evening of Poetry and Politics.”

⁴⁵ *Nuclear Savage: The Island Experiments of Secret Project 4.1*, directed by Adam Jonas Horovitz (San Francisco, CA: Video Project, 2011) DVD.

⁴⁶ David Oronos, “‘At the End’ Paper” (California State University, East Bay, 2022), 2.

⁴⁷ Davis and Todd, “On the Importance of a Date,” 763.

⁴⁸ Perez, Craig Santos, “Thinking (and feeling),” 1–5.

⁴⁹ Oronos, 3.

⁵⁰ Oronos, “At the End,” 2022, <https://anitachangworks.com/2022/05/21/an-evening-of-poetry-and-politics/>.

⁵¹ “An Evening of Poetry and Politics.”

⁵² Jetñil-Kijiner, 64.