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Swelling Horizons: Coloniality, Sea-Level Rise, and their Otherwise

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Abstract 'Sea-level rise' is widely used to denote the severity of climate change. This article argues that the concept is also shaped by a colonial grammar of relating to the ocean while its use may affectively standardise frontline communities. To reorient such ways of relating to aqueous catastrophe, the article dwells on the concept of 'swelling horizons'. Noticing the swells of late-liberal horizons generates an *otherwise* which prompts reorientations; in-between terrestrial horizons and submersive thought, attentive to multiple times and spaces, prepositionally resourceful, and attuned to the racialised heaviness of climate coloniality.

Keywords Sea-level rise. Horizon. Coloniality. Climate change. Climate Im/Mobility Studies. Édouard Glissant. Critical Ocean Studies. Environmental Humanities.

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1 Introduction

Horizons circumscribe, ground, and materialise the contexts for matter to coalesce in various ways. Horizons circumscribe by setting the limits of what can be seen, by marking the point where distant objects either become too small to be legible as objects – thus collapsing into the horizonal line – or where they literally 'fall below' the horizon due to the planet's spherical nature. There is a sense of epistemological loss at play since the line marks the point where the objects 'fall below' or 'collapse into', and this loss thickens the horizon's line. Furthermore, in forming a background, horizons also ground objects as objects to be foregrounded. The same objects, however, are simultaneously woven into the horizon and tacitly shape the contexts in which we live. Horizons thus both circumscribe how matter becomes meaningful and how matter comes to materialise. For some, horizons are 'out there', dividing blue oceans from blue skies. Today, these oceans are expanding and with them, their horizonal lines swell too. So, what happens when a horizon changes and moves forward into houses, submerges bodies, creates depth, swamps the ground? What swelling, swollen patterns and bodies might these horizons create? How does such patterning emerge out of the woundedness of a planet marred by coloniality?[1]

These questions arise in the so-called Anthropocene, the epoch where anthropogenic climate change is pushing the watery horizons of the seas upwards.[2] This complex, expanding, affective, often-violent process is frequently subsumed under the heading of 'sea-level rise'. However, in their chapter "When Above" in *Oceans Rising*, architects John Palmesino and Ann-Sofi Rönnskog interpret it differently. They write that "the horizon is swelled by sea level rise" and that this moving horizon is crucial by shaping how we come to realise the planetary impacts of our actions (Palmesino, Rönnskog 2021, 10). The swelling horizon constitutes an opening to think sea-level rise differently. Inspired by this, I wish to contribute a sustained engagement with the idea of a swelling horizon and how it shapes the realisations Palmesino and Rönnskog speak of. Hence, in this paper, I explore the implications of thinking with swelling horizons.

However, why be concerned with the predominance of 'sea-level rise' in understanding the changing oceans? I believe that an answer

1 In this article, I draw on Aníbal Quijano's (2007, 171) use of coloniality as the racialising, enduring power structures of particular, Eurocentric colonialisms: "coloniality of power is based upon 'racial' social classification of the world population under Eurocentered world power".

2 When I use 'climate change', I follow Elizabeth M. DeLoughrey (2019, 7) in characterising it as "a world-changing rupture in a social and ecological system that might be read as colonization in one context or sea-level rise in another".

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to this can be found at the intersection of climate im/mobility studies and environmental humanities. Rising sea-levels are often used to facilitate an understanding of the future through narratives about people who are set in motion, trapped, submerged, or defend themselves against rising sea-levels (Farbotko, Lazrus 2012; see also Gilroy 2014; Baucom 2020). Examples are apocalyptic headlines such as "There could be 1.2 billion climate refugees by 2050".[3] More place-specific ones could be the ongoing fortification of the Netherlands' system of dikes;[4] or the imagery of disappearing islands in Oceania, islands reduced to signs of what is to come (Farbotko 2010). Additionally, climate mobilities are politically, historically, and colonially saturated in their dramatically unequal means of responding to such swelling horizons. Can the concept of sea-level rise contain all these movements, these swells? And what does the concept do to how these swells are figured? Accordingly, this paper centres on 1) a critique of the concept sea-level rise and 2) a sustained engagement with swelling horizons as an alternative way of figuring the places made to matter through the concept of sea-level rise.

Regarding 1), I will argue that 'sea-level rise' is embedded within a colonial grammar of territorialisation and is used to affectively standardise those in positions vulnerable to swelling oceans. 'Sea-level rise' works through a process of abstraction away from the affectivity of the littoral, the intensely and immediately felt shore; mud under feet, sand emptying itself through fingers, an expansive horizon sensed in its magnitude. As such, 'sea-level rise' works in an affectively vacuous way by figuring changing oceans in terms of idealised altitudinal planes, that is, levels. To make sea-level rise felt – to, in a neoliberal, humanitarian context, sell the idea of climate change – such affective vacuity calls for affective filling-in. This work is often done by the figure of the climate refugee.[5] Such affective work, coupled with the mechanisms of sea-level rise, culminates as the 'sea-level refugee', a "root identity" (Glissant 1997, 143). I argue that the sea-level refugee demonstrates one way that 'sea-level rise' affectively standardises those in positions vulnerable to climate

3 See McAllister's (23 October 2024) article in Zurich Insurance's magazine at the following link https://www.zurich.com/en/media/magazine/2022/there-could-be-1-2-billion-climate-refugees-by-2050-here-s-what-you-need-to-know.

4 For example, see the Dutch government's initiative called "Delta Programme 2023: Speed Up, Connect and Reconstruct" (September 2022) at the following link https://english.deltaprogramma.nl/site/binaries/site-content/collections/documents/2022/09/20/delta-programme-2023-english---print-version/8397+Interactieve+DP+2023_DEF+ENG.pdf.

5 Unless specified otherwise, I do not use 'climate refugee' to refer to specific persons. Rather, I employ this term to signify a discursive move by which 'the other' is reduced to a climate refugee (see Boas et al. 2022; Bettini 2019).

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change by reducing vulnerabilities to an altitudinal level. Drawing on the work of Édouard Glissant, such reductions are, despite the sense of novelty often associated with climate change, shaped by coloniality. To disrupt such continuities, new ways of figuring the spaces occupied by 'sea-level rise' are needed.

Concerning 2), I venture that 'swelling horizons' provides one such way by layering, infusing, and circumscribing late-liberal horizons 'out-there' with an otherwise. To demonstrate this, I propose that noticing swelling horizons occasion, at least, four different (re) orientations to how places, worlds, histories, and peoples are problematised through the concept of sea-level rise. First, as a concept that helps thinking between terrestriality and submersion. Second, by how the swells have a capacity to ripple across space and time, carrying stories and materials with them. Third, by how they gesture to ways of being not only 'on' the horizon, but also as, in, or of their swells, a gesture which also indicates the power dynamics conditioning such differing prepositional relations. Fourth, I argue that horizons swell heavily, both in the unbearable heaviness of climate coloniality experienced by many today, and in the waters that are materially heavy from processes of racialisation and exploits of colonialism. As becomes clear, swelling horizons are not 'good'. Rather, they should encourage a critical sensibility to how horizons are deeply historicised, paradoxically material, and energetic while generating uneasy, peculiar in-betweens.

To make these arguments, I think with various theorisers as a praxis of conceptual analysis. I understand this as exploring and critiquing what concepts do, a methodology that acknowledges the political nature of "concepts understood as action" (Povinelli 2021, 1). Accordingly, siting the argument becomes particularly important by developing and demonstrating the argument further at specific places and times.[6] Throughout this paper, a recurring place is Oceania. I have chosen this focus since it is a place where colonial and nuclear histories meet swelling oceans, alongside long-standing histories of mobility erased and told anew by the Global North through climate refugee narratives.[7] Such themes also resound in Oceanians' ongoing conversations about the region's history and future (for instance Bordner, Ferguson, Ortolano 2020; PIFS 2017; Freestone, Schofield 2016; Farbotko 2010; Hau'ofa 1994; Wendt 1976).

6 I prefer the verb 'to site' over 'case-study', since the idea of a case implies too singular an idea about the complex, ever-evolving sites in which climate change takes place.

7 However simplistic the North/South binary may be, it still usefully registers structuring forces of history all the while these are "geographical spaces marked by heterogeneity and historical differences" (Sultana 2022, 4). Furthermore, when using 'the West', I take this term to refer to the West in its colonising powers, past and present.

The structure of the paper is as follows: First, I analyse Glissant's use of root identity, *chaos-monde*, and affective standardisation. Siting my argument at Oceania, I then develop a critique of how 'sea-level rise' is shaped by coloniality while affectively standardising precarities through the root identity of the sea-level refugee. As a short intermezzo, I consider Glissant's reflections on how root identities might be renewed and disrupted. Next, I analyse horizons starting from what Elizabeth A. Povinelli (2021) calls the toxicity of late-liberalism. Noticing horizons' multiple swells, I then explore how swelling horizons occasion, at least, four reorientations after a critique of sea-level rise.

2 Colonialism and 'Sea-Level Rise': Root Identity and Affective Standardisations

On Runit Island, in the Enewetak atoll, there is The Tomb, a concrete dome covering the radioactive waste of numerous nuclear bombs, detonated by the US at this and a neighbouring atoll in the name of 'peace' (Bordner, Ferguson, Ortolano 2020). The Tomb is also barely above water. Today, rising tides have started eroding The Tomb's concrete, causing it to leak radioactive waste into waters already affected by colonial histories and nuclear impacts. Nuclear horizons of colonial experimentation meet horizons of changing oceans, in my case mediated through satellite imagery offered by the US military and corporations, and such imagery's inherent "terrestrial bias" (Jue 2020, 83). Considering current pan-Pacific movements to regenerate aqueous cultures and decolonise in the wake of colonial devastation (D'Arcy 2018, 121; Wendt 1976), these waters are historically, worldly, and politically integral to many Marshall Islanders.

Now, these nuclear, watery horizons are swelling, threatening the existence of the Marshall Islands (Bordner, Ferguson, Ortolano 2020). Consequently, some Marshall Islanders are moving to new places such as Orange County, California (see Hess, Nero, Burton 2001), a place also precariously exposed to a swelling horizon. Simultaneously, the islands are being reappropriated as climate disaster's ground zero, living proof of anthropogenic climate change (Farbotko 2010), hereby swelling the horizons of the Global North with narratives of 'it could be us'. All the above are problems of sea-level rise, but they also seem to exceed such modelled horizonal lines in their existential thrust, intermingling cultures, and dynamics steeped in imperialism. How are we to understand these transforming oceans, and what happens when the term 'sea-level rise' is made to represent situations like the above?

I argue that the use of 'sea-level rise' frames relations to transforming oceans through the colonial grammar of root identity.[8] Discourses surrounding sea-level rise hinge on powers of territorialisation, often those of the West, while they render historical continuities of socio-environmental violence invisible. To make this argument, I will be drawing on the work of Édouard Glissant (1928-2011), a (post)colonial[9] thinker and poet from Martinique. In particular, I explore his concepts of Root identity and affective standardisation. Glissant's *Poetics of Relation* clarifies the colonial historicity of the above two arguments concerning the colonial grammar and affectivity of the concept sea-level rise.

2.1 Édouard Glissant and Caribbean Theorising

Glissant's work can be characterised as part of a tradition of decolonial, Caribbean thought alongside, among many others, Aimé Césaire, Frantz Fanon, Kamau Brathwaite, and Sylvia Wynter. To Glissant's fellow thinker Manthia Diawara (2015), Glissant was "a theorizer of the concept of relation". According to Diawara (2015), Glissant re-created himself in this theorising role "to reveal the fluidity of relation". In this paper, writing that Glissant may be characterised as part of a Caribbean tradition becomes important since Glissant explicitly engages with the ecologies, politics, and histories of the Caribbean. I cover each of these themes in turn.

Ecologically, Glissant observes that the geographical openness of the Caribbean inspires forms of theorising that open up towards complexity without trying to enclose and determine such complexity as knowledge. To Glissant (1997, 33-4), this contrasts with the enclosure of the Mediterranean by the lands that surround it. Politically, Glissant is the main theoriser of the *créolité* movement (Buchanan 2018) which has defined itself in opposition to the *négritude* movement. Négritude arose as a revolt against French colonial oppression and white universalism while self-affirmatively proclaiming the values of a "Black World" (Diagne 2023). To the *créolité* movement, *négritude* places too much emphasis on a common African heritage, instead of acknowledging the composite, multiply cultural nature of Caribbean identity (Diagne 2023). Moreover, to Glissant, the historicity of this identity is inextricably tied to the deaths and innumerable crimes

8 For an adjacent argument concerning the grammar of geology and the racial blindness of the Anthropocene, see Kathryn Yusoff's (2018) *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None*.

9 Following Ann Laura Stoler, I use the parentheses around 'post' to emphasise that we cannot assume any straightforward before and after when it comes to acts of colonisation (Stoler 2016, ix).

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committed in the "womb abyss" of the enslavers' ships (Glissant 1997, 7). Instead of being rooted relative to a specific mix of African ancestries, and thus essentialising them as fixed relations (Glissant 1997, 135), Glissant shows how Caribbean identity is born on the journey itself as the very process of cultural relating.

Today, Glissant's approach to thinking seems aptly poised to address the environmental humanities' attempts at prying open various concepts of nature to new interpretations (Neimanis, Åsberg, Hedrén 2015, 71). Not least because these attempts to relate differently to a Blue Planet should avoid producing further harmful reductions in the process of reimagining it. Moreover, Glissant does not assume the position of a distant theoriser, but instead demonstrates how ecologies and histories inflect theorising. While acknowledging the political and geographical context of Glissant's writings, I explore the conceptual vocabulary of *Poetics of Relation*, its method, and take it somewhere else, specifically to critique discourses and practices surrounding 'sea-level rise'. Specifically, I read *Poetics of Relation* as holding key insights for understanding the ontological impetus, epistemology, and coloniality of 'sea-level rise'. By these I mean, respectively, what senses of reality 'sea-level rise' prefigures and is embedded within; how 'sea-level rise' facilitates certain modes of understanding and not others; and how this onto-epistemological impetus is affected by enduring power structures produced on a planetary scale during Western Europe's violent colonisation of the world.

In what follows, I interpret key passages in *Poetics of Relation*. Here it is important to note that, to Glissant, some theorising may constitute a poetics. This is the case when theorising aims to better imagine the world we are in instead of theorising as if the totality of the world is an object to be determined and known (Glissant 1997, 154). Moreover, theorising becomes active by enacting its poetics and moving the reader's imagination, something Glissant does by for instance introducing neologisms and rearranging words in unconventional ways (Wing 1997, xii). Such an imaginative, political, and active potential of theorising will be a recurring theme throughout this paper. I first analyse what Glissant means by root and root identity, and how the latter constitutes a colonially founded grammar. Thereafter, I analyse *chaos-monde* (which may roughly be translated as chaos-world)[10] as a way the world of root identities also 'is'. Finally, I analyse the idea of 'affective standardisation' and discuss how it connects with the production of root identities in *chaos-monde*.

10 However, a lot is lost in this act of translation since *chaos-monde* is a neologism that plays with ordinary French use of *le chaos* and *monde*. To emphasise the act of creating a neologism, I follow the translator, Betsy Wing, in using the French terminology (Wing 1997, xv).

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2.2 Root and Territory: A Colonial Grammar of Identification

In Glissant's work *Poetics of Relation*, the term 'root' figures prominently as a way of relating to places. Because of today's transforming oceans, places erode, ebb and flow, withstand, wash away; their matters both filter into and sediment other places while being laboriously kept together and reassembled.[11] Since 'sea-level rise' is fundamentally connected to changing places, the concept of 'root' seems a good place to begin an analysis. I interpret 'root' in the sense of 'finding your roots' or 'going back to your roots' but also 'taking root' or 'growing roots'. Referring to Deleuze and Guattari, Glissant contrasts rootedness with nomadism, a term that Deleuze and Guattari favour over rootedness (Glissant 1997, 11). However, Glissant is critical of nomadism and brings up various examples to show its sometimes brutally violent role (for instance the invading nomadism of the Huns). This is important because it points to how rootedness is not bad in itself,[12] but that the violence today implied by root identity specifically relates to the West's way of rooting itself in preparation for its colonisation of the world (Glissant 1997, 14). That is, the West's violent colonisation is pre-empted by fixing and declaring its land as nations, by implanting its roots so that they can spread and take hold across the planet. In doing so, rootedness becomes connected to 'violent filiation' and 'territoriality' by virtue of its historicity. Such a colonial grammar of identification is clustered through "[*r*]*oot identity*" (Glissant 1997, 143).

Violent filiation starts from and is defined through a legitimating origin story, often of how 'the world' is created. What follows is a linear chain of filiation wherein places and people are rooted insofar as they descend from this origin story (Glissant 1997, 47). Hereby, the person, place, or community's root identity is produced by being legitimated and identified as a link in this chain (Glissant 1997, 143). This is a 'violent' process of filiation since it consists in "the absolute exclusion of the other" (Glissant 1997, 52). By absolute exclusion, Glissant means that there is no space for the other to be opaquely ungraspable. Instead of existing on their own terms, the other can only be 'included' by assimilating and making themselves transparently understandable on the terms dictated by the filiating line, in its violent grasp. Yet, the other is also opaque. Therefore, they

11 For more on how such 'placekeeping' unfolds across the planet, see Summer Gray's (2023) *In the Shadow of the Seawall: Coastal Injustice and the Dilemma of Placekeeping*. The roots of mangroves play a key role when negotiating forms of placekeeping, highlighting one of the many ways that places are deeply connected to their literal roots.

12 Indeed, Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner, a performance poet from the Marshall Islands, recites that "We will choose | to be rooted in this reef | forever" (Jetñil-Kijiner, Niviâna s.d.).

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are effectively erased, at least partially, from the world produced on the terms of a specific creation story (Glissant 1997, 49).[13]

Besides maintaining the production of root identity through the exclusion or assimilation of the other, root identity also perseveres by projecting its filiating line onto further lands and possessing those as territories (Glissant 1997, 143). Land is turned into territory by conceiving it as something to be (dis)possessed. Conversely, root identity is endangered in the loss of land 'as' territory, in losing that which it constructed as its possession. For this paper, root identity usefully registers how its violent production is inextricable from its colonial beginnings while also connecting with a colonial grammar of (dis)possession of territory and violent filiation. Here, although historicised by the West's colonisation, it is important to note that root identity works across power formations. I do not assume there to be a pre-given set of positionalities which may be produced as rooted identities. Furthermore, the root identity brings with it a view of the other where they must be rooted in a line of filiation, that is where they are assimilated and/or erased: root identities aim to produce rooted identities.

2.3 *Chaos-Monde* of Root Identity and its Affective Standardisation

To Glissant, the terms of root identity do not properly express the world. It is not made up of pre-given territories, ancestries, and nations. Rather, (the) world 'is' chaos and wildly accelerating (Glissant 1997, 141). Moreover, it is chaos in a way that elicits an "unconscious and desperate rage at not 'grasping'" it as chaos (Glissant 1997, 141). However, in *Poetics of Relation* 'chaos' attains a special meaning in how it is often hyphenated with *monde* (the French term for 'world') to create the neologism *chaos-monde*. To say that the world 'is' chaos is a statement concerning the world's being. However, such ontological impetus does not necessarily consist in disorder for "[c]haos is not 'chaotic'" (Glissant 1997, 94). Given the ordinary meaning of chaos as disorder (*Collins English Dictionary* s.d.), this seems counterintuitive, which Glissant (1997, 133) readily acknowledges. So, why use the term 'chaos'?

To answer this question, it is important to consider what it means to hyphenate 'chaos' and 'world'. With *chaos-monde*, Glissant (1997,

13 To Glissant, in the West, this pattern of legitimating, assimilating, or excluding the other became particularly pernicious because of the story of Christ and its paradigmatic filiation of Father and Son, not least in the very naming scheme of historical, linear time: "*before and after Christ*" (Glissant 1997, 48; emphasis in the original).

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94) refers to how the world is also realised through relations with no pregiven norms and hierarchies. This suggests a reading of *chaos-monde* as 'world that *is*' in a non-deterministic and relational way, irreducible to any singular totality, especially given how Glissant criticises cultural reductions and exclusions of the other. Such a reading is also reflected by the extent to which Glissant often entirely avoids using any article, both definite and indefinite, in writing about *chaos-monde* (see, for instance, Glissant 1997, 139), a practice I loosely follow here. Nevertheless, *chaos-monde* still names 'world', however non-determinately so. In this naming act, some sense of order is hyphenated with chaos. This then also implies that the being of 'world' is inflected with the indeterminacy and irreducibility of chaos, but which can nonetheless be imagined and inquired after 'as' world. The ontological impetus and relationality of *chaos-monde* sits at its core since its neologistic character is produced and maintained by the hyphenating, relating line.

Elaborating on the *chaos-monde* leads Glissant to affirm the necessity of a poetics of Relation as an aesthetic moment that helps better imagine how the world 'is' in its chaos. This is because such a poetics, according to Glissant, does not seek to determine, fix, or reduce the world. Rather, a poetics of Relation "senses, assumes, opens, gathers, scatters, continues and transforms" the ways we think the *chaos-monde* (Glissant 1997, 94-5). Consequently, I read the choice of chaos in *chaos-monde* as a commitment to irreducibility and non-determinacy, and a simultaneous affirmation of ways of imagining 'world' through the hyphenating act. For this paper, *chaos-monde* usefully proclaims 'world' and simultaneously commits to its non-determinacy. Because of the planetary scope of the precarity of today's ecologies, such a relational approach which affirmatively names 'world' becomes necessary. It provides a framework for imagining beyond, across, underneath, and in the worldly interstices of specific contexts. Simultaneously, *chaos-monde* also affirms a non-determinacy important to such projects and names them 'poetics'. Hereby, (poetic) inquiry must open and transform rather than fix or determine. Regarding rising sea-levels, while both 'sea level' and 'sea-level' are often used, I have chosen to use the hyphenated form to integrate the hyphenating act and indicate that the words affect each other.

Finally, in today's *chaos-monde*, Glissant writes that there is a "disturbing affective standardisation of peoples, whose affect has been diverted by the processes and products of international exchange, either consented to or imposed" (Glissant 1997, 148). Glissant argues that goods such as Coca-Cola crowd out so-called local products, making people accustomed to the taste of the international product. Hereby, those in power standardise others' affective relations. These standardisations end up holding their own power and legitimacy,

and thus take root, similarly to the workings of root identity. Adding to Glissant, I understand consumption goods to also include the consumption of news media, documentaries, and the circulation of these throughout societies. Of course, concepts are also embedded in such discourse, providing one medium through which they, in the words of Povinelli come to "*matter-forth*" (Povinelli, Gandorfer, Ayub 2021, 305). Consequently, I take the above as inspiration to argue that 'sea-level rise' affectively standardises peoples' ways of relating to transforming oceans, an argument I will develop further by siting it in Oceania.

3 Sea-Level Refugees

In discourses about climate change, 'the climate refugee' is often called upon to stress the dire reality of planetary catastrophe. The World Economic Forum names climate refugees "the world's forgotten victims".[14] To UN Secretary-General António Guterres, the climate refugee appears in the millions, billions, as "a mass exodus of entire populations on a biblical scale" that forms a swelling "tide of insecurity".[15] This statement has been reproduced by multiple media-outlets such as the Washington Post and the Guardian, often followed by Guterres' (2023) reference to the nearly 900 million (often reported as one billion) "people who live in coastal zones at low elevations".[16] These discourses turn into a numbers game: 1.2 billion, 2 billion, 3 billion.[17] In the headline of one article, climate change is

14 See the article by Ida "Climate Refugees – The World's Forgotten Victims" (18 June 2021) at the following link https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2021/06/climate-refugees-the-world-s-forgotten-victims/.

15 See Guterres' full statement "Secretary-General's Remarks to the Security Council Debate on 'Sea-level Rise: Implications for International Peace and Security'" (14 February 2023) at the following link https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/statement/2023-02-14/secretary-generals-remarks-the-security-council-debate-sea-level-rise-implications-for-international-peace-and-security.

16 For the Washington Post article by Pannett (15 February 2023), see the following link https://www.washingtonpost.com/climate-environment/2023/02/15/un-sea-levels-rising-climate-migration/. For the Guardian article by Carrington (14 February 2023), see the following link https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2023/feb/14/rising-seas-threaten-mass-exodus-on-a-biblical-scale-un-chief-warns.

17 For example, see the article by McAllister "There Could be 1.2 billion Climate Refugees by 2050. Here's What You Need to Know" at the following link https://www.zurich.com/media/magazine/2022/there-could-be-1-2-billion-climate-refugees-by-2050-here-s-what-you-need-to-know, the article by Friedlander "Rising Seas Could Result in 2 Billion Refugees by 2100" (19 June 2017), at the following link https://news.cornell.edu/stories/2017/06/rising-seas-could-result-2-billion-refugees-2100, and the article by Vince "Is the World Ready for Mass Migration Due to Climate Change?" (18 November 2022) at the following link https://www.bbc.com/

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even made fuel, thus taking the backseat to the migration it ignites.[18] Both biblical and swelling, the vulnerable are ripe for headlining. The racialised other of the shore, of the root, of the nation is split, flattened by the line of the sea-level and swell 'our' horizons: "The climate refugee crisis is landing on Europe's shores" (Özdemir 2023).[19] Those precariously exposed to the violences of climate change are made sea-level refugees.

There is no consensus regarding the effects of climate change on mobility (Zickgraf 2018, 72). Moreover, news media rarely give a voice to those choosing voluntary immobility (Farbotko et al. 2020, 703) and those who are (and will be) trapped by climate change (Ayeb-Karlsson, Smith, Kniveton 2018, 570). Moreover, much of the displacement caused by climate change is local and largely contradicts Global North narratives about the swelling numbers of people arriving at its shores (Boas et al. 2019). The figure of the climate refugee is extensively critiqued, yet continuously invoked. Climate im/mobilities do not follow linear, transnational patterns, yet they are often evoked as such. I believe that the concept of sea-level rise performs an important role in perpetuating the rootedness of such paradoxes. Indeed, what happens when the figure of the climate refugee is introduced, specifically within discourses surrounding sea-level rise? To attempt an answer, I first describe how material littorals become indexed as sea-levels, and the political nature of how this takes place. This is important to understand what the discourse of sea-level rise does to the figure of the climate refugee. Afterwards, I discuss the affectivity of sea-level rise and how the affectively standardising figure of the sea-level refugee is produced in portrayals of Oceania.

3.1 Becoming Sea-Level in Oceania

According to political geographer Katherine G. Sammler (2020, 606), the sea-level is a "technical and political construction of the sea's surface as a horizontal plane". The act of measuring a sea-level is political. This is because the measured sea-level creates a baseline against which national territory is established (Sammler 2020, 617).

future/article/20221117-how-borders-might-change-to-cope-with-climate-migration.

18 See the article by Prange "Climate Change Is Fueling Migration. Do Climate Migrants Have Legal Protections?" (19 December 2022) at the following link https://www.cfr.org/in-brief/climate-change-fueling-migration-do-climate-migrants-have-legal-protections.

19 See the article by Özdemir (20 February 2023) at the following link https://www.politico.eu/article/climate-refugee-crisis-europe-policy/.

For instance, territorial claims can be expanded by measuring the sea-level at low tide and pointing to the coastal features that appear (Sammler 2020, 614). Thus, an important site for the measurement and political construction of sea-levels is the littoral, the places where the planet ebbs and flows. Furthermore, it is a site that, when turned into a series of idealised coast*lines*, functions as the precondition for baselines (Sammler 2020, 607). That is, in Glissantian terms, the littoral's non-determinacy as chaos, is rendered transparent and acted upon through political idealisations of it as coastlines.

Nevertheless, the construction of sea-levels does not only take place at the littoral. While locally, the sea-level is measured using tide stations, globally it is assembled from satellite data as a mean sea-level in relation to the location of the Earth's centre of mass, thereby constructing a reference sphere of the Earth (Sammler 2020, 612). When turned into a global mean sea-level, the ocean provides a reference against which the altitudes of mountains and terrestrial borders are produced and negotiated. As an example, Sammler (2020, 613) notes the border disputes between Nepal and Tibet which hinge on Mt Everest's 'official' height that is measured in relation to the mean sea-level.

However, the material and unruly elemental interfaces of the littorals challenge these processes of territorialisation, and they are especially put under pressure today due to anthropogenic climate change (Sammler 2020, 617). This has led to "extreme legal uncertainty" where the legitimacy of various borders, both maritime and terrestrial, is questioned (Houghton et al. 2010, 816). Given how processes of territorialisation are implicated in the creation of a sea-level, 'sea-level rise' is thus inextricable from root identities, since such identities are reproduced by legitimating land as territory. To avoid being put at the forefront of yet another climate injustice and to affirm their agency, the Marshall Islands has leapfrogged this legal stalemate and declared its maritime borders to the UN (Freestone, Schofield 2016). Thereby, the Marshall Islands attempts to determine its borders in an ocean swelling and transfiguring the littorals which had been providing the country's baselines. Such a temporal fixity in the face of planetary time goes to show how 'sea-level rise' is woven into complex geopolitical questions, thus exerting pressure on the idealisations through which territorialisation has so far taken place.

The Marshall Islands is also part of the Pacific Islands Forum, which is the primary political and economic organisation of the Pacific region and comprises 18 member states. In 2017, Oceanian leaders chose to name this region "THE BLUE PACIFIC – OUR SEA OF ISLANDS" (PIFS 2017, 2). 'The Blue Pacific' also figures prominently in their *2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent* (PIFS

2022).[20] According to the Pacific Islands Forum (2017, 3), this act of identification was intended to further regionalisation and reinforce the connections between Pacific peoples, their cultures and ecologies, alongside a commitment to their stewardship of Oceania. This last point is no small feat, given they "are the custodians of nearly 20 percent of the earth's surface" (PIFS 2022, 8) while comprising less than 40 million of the planet's stewards. These terms of stewardship and custodianship help parse relations to Oceania differently from relations of territoriality and possessiveness.

Moreover, the renaming act turns from the terrestrial towards the sea in the formation of a political identity. I interpret this as the creation of an elemental poetics of 'the Blue' with which identities are formed starting from water, not from a sense of earth often associated with territorialisation.[21] The inextricability of root identity from 'sea-level rise' cannot account for such aqueous relations of stewardship given its emphasis on land and territorialisation. Thus, the naming of a Blue Pacific demonstrates certain limits of root identity in addition to a perspective that can be afforded when one goes beyond the sea-level and its territorial focus. Other names have also been offered. In § 6.2, I discuss Epeli Hau'ofa's (1994) seminal article "Our Sea of Islands" and his choice of Oceania, a term allying itself with local indigenous practices, histories, and decolonial commitments (see Wendt 1976; Hanlon 2017), and which I have chosen to follow in this paper.

The above analysis nuances what root identities associated with sea-level rise can mean in the wake of colonialisms and imperialism. When it comes to asserting one's (legal) agency amidst coloniality and sea-level rise, a colonial grammar of root identity is often all there is: to safeguard the conditions of liveability undergirding the very possibility of a Sea of Islands, the Marshall Islands attempt to maintain existing baselines despite the changing littorals of the island 'territories'. However, here such a colonially founded grammar of territorialisation is counteracted by the naming the Blue Pacific and its commitments to custodianship and an elemental poetics of the Blue. Because of this counteracting motion, the grammar of root identity seems strategically mobilised without fully realising its identification with territorialising and possessive forms of relating. In this context, the very necessity of having to reclaim the name of the Blue Pacific also points to the colonially founded dominance of territory and terrestriality over stewardship and 'the Blue'.

20 'Our Sea of Islands' is also a reference to the influential essay by Epeli Hau'ofa (1994). I return to this in § 6.2.

21 Although, as DeLoughrey (2019, 109) emphasises, it is important not to overlook the extensive military territorialisation of the oceans.

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Nevertheless, the latter are parsed through the coloniser's language, English. Of course, in the ideal world, such a renaming would never be necessary since the original colonial naming, and its "massive earth-destroying Death Star ripping and gutting a million worlds" (Povinelli 2021, 56) would never have taken place.

The possibility for analysing the naming act of the Blue Pacific is thus only possible against the backdrop of a world of coloniality. Here, Oceania demonstrates a way of relating to the oceans different from those made legible through sea-level rise's grammar of terrestrial (dis)possession all the while the region contours such a grammar. It also demonstrates limits and complexities of root identity as it is lived out amidst concrete geographies, politics, and times, and, by extension, 'sea-level rise'. These reflections resonate with Elizabeth M. DeLoughrey's (2019, 7) reading of climate change as, among many other ways, "colonization in one context or sea-level in another". The political character of sea-level constructions demonstrates that the two contexts affect one another. Consequently, insofar as 'sea-level rise' relies on the colonially loaded notions of territory, terrestriality, and relations of (dis)possession, then the changing oceans are parsed through a colonial mode of understanding. I have pointed out multiple ways in which this is the case. In the following, I turn to the affective dimension of 'sea-level rise' and how the figure of the climate refugee is often produced in relation to contexts where 'sea-level rise' is mobilised.

3.2 Affective Vacuity: Enter, 'Climate Refugee'

In the field of environmental humanities, some aim to make climate change more tangible (Neimanis, Åsberg, Hedrén 2015, 74). However, in doing so, Claire Colebrook (2011) argues a divide appears between an 'extensive' consumption of affective input and a simultaneous lack of 'intensive' affectivity: while climate change may be rendered affectively tangible such affects do not necessarily mobilise action (Colebrook 2011, 53). In this paper, I define the affective as that which is felt. Accordingly, extensive affect is that which is 'merely' felt, and intensive affect is that which is felt and mobilises some intentional action. Concerning sea-level rise, there is a lack of affectivity in how 'sea-level rise' functions as a way of fixing the varying, complex oceans through a "practical, world-spanning abstraction" (Helmreich 2023, 11). Moreover, a lack of affectivity stems from the difference between the immediately felt sea at the littoral zone and the calculation of a mean sea-level that is done across a longer span of time (e.g. across varying tides). Establishing a sea-level is exactly done by abstracting away from the littoral's specific felt moments of floods, tides, and swells. This process of abstracting from the sea's affectivity and

working across time to create a stable concept of the sea-level is also part of the concept's historical development by scholars in the West (von Hardenberg 2021, 140). I understand this to mean that, to some extent, 'sea-level rise' operates in an affectively vacuous way, meaning that it calls for affective filling-in to be felt.

The figure of the climate refugee is often procured to provide a way for consuming the idea of 'sea-level rise', thus responding to its affective vacuity. One example particularly illustrates such an affective filling-in. The Institute for Economics and Peace wrote a report estimating that the number of people displaced by climate change will reach 1.2 billion in 2050.[22] The World Economic Forum and Zurich Insurance then reported this as 1.2 billion 'climate refugees'.[23] This part of my critique of 'sea-level rise' aims at these types of discursive changes, here from the abstract notion of 'displaced people' to the affectively standardising imagery of 'climate refugees'. In this case, the conceptual imagery of the term does not lead to an intense affectivity but rather an extensive affectivity in how people are made ready for consumption in the headlines of various media outlets around the world.

According to Giovanni Bettini (2019, 339), the affectivity of discourses surrounding climate migration is in general "immobilized in the insistence on vacuous, evanescent, non-actionable narratives on climate refugees". This relates to the predominance of extensive rather than intensive affectivity. Furthermore, the notion of climate refugee has already been widely criticised by many for how it erases the agency of those affected by promoting environmental determinism while drawing attention away from intersectional concerns (Bettini 2019, 337). However, as the above examples show and Bettini notes, the identity of the climate refugee continues to be reproduced. Bettini (2019, 339) argues that reading the discourses on migration and climate change as symptomatic helps explain the reproduction of the climate refugee identity. Here, Bettini argues that the climate refugee is symptomatic of three repressions of the (non-Western, non-affluent, non-white) vulnerable other. These are repressions that continuously reproduce the figure of the climate refugee. First, as 'bare life' and objects of humanitarianism or securitisation; second,

22 See the report "Ecological Threat Register 2020: Understanding Ecological Threats, Resilience and Peace" at the following link https://www.economicsandpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/ETR_2020_web-1.pdf.

23 The World Economic Forum article by Ida (18 June 2021) can be found here https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2021/06/climate-refugees-the-world-s-forgotten-victims/. The Zurich Insurance article by McAllister (23 October 2024) can be found here https://www.zurich.com/media/magazine/2022/there-could-be-1-2-billion-climate-refugees-by-2050-here-s-what-you-need-to-know.

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as vehicles for mobilising action and claims concerning climate justice; and third, as living proof of what is to come.

To this mechanism of symptom and repression, I contend that the figure of the climate refugee functions differently when produced in relation to the colonial grammar of 'sea-level rise'. The sea-level refugee is more than a symptom since it is also called forth because of the affective vacuity of 'sea-level rise', its terrestriality, and its possessively territorialising grammar. The way Oceania is mobilised internationally as climate change's ground zero helps illustrate this argument.

3.3 Altitudinal Laboratories in Oceania

In the article "Wishful Sinking: Disappearing Islands, Climate Refugees and Cosmopolitan Experimentation", Carol Farbotko (2010) outlines and critiques discourses about how Tuvalu will be affected by sea-level rise (see also Farbotko, Lazrus 2012, 383). Farbotko critiques how Tuvaluans' long-standing practices of mobility are reduced to those of the climate refugee. They are made into something "to fear and/or control, even if empathically" (Farbotko 2010, 53). Furthermore, the West's news surrounding Tuvaluans tends to sustain the figure of the climate refugee as a "victim-commodity, providing news value, political point-scoring, and a human embodiment of climate change 'evidence'" (Farbotko, Lazrus 2012, 386).

More specifically, Farbotko (2010, 53) is critical of how Tuvalu is "imagined as an island laboratory" to construct the impacts of climate change as observable and prove the global urgency of climate change. The islands of Oceania have historically been construed as 'ideal' laboratories because of how they were imagined to be "isolated in space and frozen in time, simpler", denying them their own cultural identities (Farbotko 2010, 54). This is reflected both by their appearance in early twentieth century anthropology as 'ideal' case-studies, and the fact that many islands, such as the Enewetak atoll, have been used as nuclear testing grounds. On such an island laboratory, the main parameters of climate change can supposedly be isolated and tested by the privileged bystanders, often the Global North. Hereby, islanders are reduced to test subjects in service of evidencing the planet's fate and "enforcing an eco-colonial gaze" (Farbotko 2010, 58). This again demonstrates DeLoughrey's (2019, 7) point that sea-level rise can elide into coloniality. The way the West relates to climate change tends to perpetuate many same-old patterns of colonialism. The violence experienced in the Anthropocene is not necessarily novel but rather historically continuous with the "disaster caused by empire" (DeLoughrey 2019, 2).

I wish to add to Farbotko's analysis by focusing on what 'sea-level' does to the imaginary of the island laboratory. Here, I read her analysis through the lens of Glissant's concept of root identity and violent filiation. Because the island laboratory works by conceiving the island as simple and isolated, it makes the effects of specific parameters transparent. By reducing Oceania to island laboratories, the precarious situation of the islands is thus also parametrised. Since many Oceanians' vulnerabilities are often expressed in terms of their relation to a sea-level, the idealised plane of the altitude and its distance to the sea-level is one of the main parametrisations. Here, the vulnerabilities of the other are reduced to their home nation's mean-level altitude, serving the purpose of making the affective charge of climate change legible to the world's privileged. The complex, swelling littoral horizons that transfigure Oceanians' existences are turned into something that can be mapped and modelled on various online maps where you can turn the expected sea-level up and down with a slider.[24]

The violent line of filiation is an index of altitudes projecting out into the future; the creation story is a narrative of a mostly consistent sea-level 'before the climate changes'; and the climate refugee is the root identity that is produced in relation to an altitude marker. The other is erased in Global North attempts to assimilate them to the transparency of a system of altitudes determined by past, present, and future sea-levels. This construction of a climate refugee through the parametrisation of changing oceans is what I mean by 'sea-level refugee'. The problem here is not that vulnerability can be partly expressed by how the changing oceans are modelled as sea-levels – this is a very real and all too urgent problem. Rather, it is an ontological and ethical problem insofar as they are made to matter primarily in relation to a sea-level, and an epistemological and political problem insofar as the 'sea-level' limits modes of inquiry instead of opening us up towards each other and the unknowable.

It is important to note that the problem is not that there necessarily is a lack of awareness surrounding sea-level rise. Rather, it concerns the 'kinds' of attention given and the way that this attention is made legible all the while intersecting with territorial concerns and material devastation. In these specific ways, 'we' are 'too' aware of sea-level rise and not conscious enough of the othering erasures, which are made to matter by it as a socio-politically assembled concept. In the next sections, I explore how affective standardisations may be disrupted and the 'sea-level' pried open to other modes of understanding, to its swells, erosions, and immediately intensive materiality.

24 For instance, see https://coastal.climatecentral.org/.

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4 Intermezzo: Renewing the Aesthetics of Sea-Level Rise

Glissant (1997, 148) argues that affective standardisations can root certain aesthetic sensibilities. A renewed aesthetics of relating to the Earth could be one response when countering this (Glissant 1997, 150). While maintaining that there might be a sense of (however wicked it may be) style to either the sea-level refugee, a rising sea-level, or climate catastrophe, I also take Glissant to mean aesthetics in the sense of an aesthetic sensibility, meaning the potential ways that the aesthetic 'object' may be rendered perceptible and affective. Moreover, in renewing such an aesthetics, Glissant writes that we must risk "passion for the land where one lives" even, and especially, in

> the half-starved dust of Africas […] the mud of flooded Asias […] the frozen silence of the Andes […] the rains uprooting favelas and shantytowns […] the scrub and scree of Bantu lands […] mud huts crowning goldmines […] haggard aboriginal wind. (Glissant 1997, 151)

Based on the elemental vocabulary (dust, mud, flooding, frozen silence, uprooting rains, scrub and scree, mud huts that crown goldmines, aboriginal winds) at play here, I interpret this as a politically laden elemental aesthetics that works with and in the face of violences experienced around the planet. In this paper, the elemental dimension is located at the intersection of water, air, and earth while emphasising the watery depths of the oceans' swellings. To Glissant (1997, 151), an elemental aesthetic is an aesthetic of "disruption and intrusion", and "rupture and connection". I interpret these as aesthetic moves that provide ways of acting upon the world through the multiple registers of connection, rupture, disruption, and intrusion. Such aesthetics are crucial to upending root identities and their violent transformations of land into territory (Glissant 1997, 151). This is an initial argument concerning what a concept ought to do, echoing Povinelli's (2021, 1) claim that concepts are "action in the world". Perhaps swelling horizons could be mobilised as this kind of action.

So, the use of sea-level rise orients people towards specific stories and shapes how such orientations come to matter, territorially and affectively. It does not always orient us in the right way. There is a need for multiple reorientations. I suggest the concept of swelling horizons is one way to produce reorientations which open, scatter, sense, and transform relations with the elements of the spaces made to matter through the lens of 'sea-level rise'. This is what I hope to demonstrate in the following.

5 'Out There': Topological, Late Liberal Horizons

'Horizon' has multiple meanings. It stems from the Ancient Greek *horízein* which means 'to divide' or 'to bound' (Hinske et al. s.d.) and, as such, it is a concept concerned with limits, particularly the limits to knowledge. Topologically, a horizon is also a dividing line 'in the distance' given by one's bodily positioning in relation to a landscape and its sky. Moreover, horizons are often politicised through a temporal focus on 'the new' (just take *Horizon Europe* for instance, EU's premier funding programme). [25] However, these different meanings quickly merge. To show this, I offer a personal vignette from my trip to Katwijk, the Netherlands:

> I stand at the top of a coastal dune. When circling around, I see everything becoming indeterminate at the horizon. To my sight, objects vanish at the horizon. They either drop below the horizon's edge due to the spherical nature of the Earth or they become so miniscule that they all collapse into a vanishing point or a line (see Macauley 2010, 64). When I move towards the horizon, it stays at a distance while it renders new objects visible on the horizon, among them a gas tanker. On the horizon, I see it as a sign of what is to come. The horizon provides the backdrop against which the gas that might be burned on my stove, that keeps me warm, is foregrounded. Instead of being an object or purely subjective, the horizon is part of my experience in terms of how I move and how I will move my body in the world, and I 'see' it in terms of the role it plays in revealing the tanker to me.

As David Macauley (2010, 65) writes, "it [the horizon] reveals the reciprocity of an observer with his or her environment". In the vignette, such reciprocity seems crystallised in a relation of 'gazing at', an individualised, visual relation with *topos*, with place. Embodied experience, knowledge, and being all tangle up in the reciprocal nature of topological horizons. However, the way I narrated my trip also relies on a passive, visual, and distanced way of understanding knowledge as something 'I possess' of 'stuff out there'. As has been argued by many, perhaps most prominently by Donna Haraway (1988), construing knowledge as the relation between a detached observer's eyes and the epistemic object leads to distancing the knowing subject as disembodied and non-situated all the while implicitly presupposing (and thus privileging) the gaze of human,

25 The concept of the horizon has also been extensively explored in phenomenology. See, for instance, Edmund Husserl ([1936] 1970), Martin Heidegger ([1927] 2010), and, for a critique, Emmanuel Levinas ([1961] 1969).

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male, able-bodied, heterosexual, and white bodies. A *topos* is then structured to make knowledge something 'out-there' 'on' the horizon, thereby supporting capitalist knowledge economies where horizons must be expanded, widened, and broadened. Consequently, such a topology of horizons also relies on embodied ways of inhabiting, dominating, and producing spaces of such political economies.

Moreover, this topology serves a(nother) political function. Povinelli (2021, 37) writes that horizons perform a key role in how contemporary liberal societies rely on and perpetuate toxic relations to the environment, key among them the current climate catastrophe. Povinelli's critique turns on the imagery of how the affluent middle-class of liberal societies merely stare at the horizon looking for the 'dark' catastrophes and 'white' saviours that might appear on it. In such a gaze, passivity is instilled in the observers toward the already unfolding catastrophic effects of liberalism (Povinelli 2021, 38). This resembles how I narrated the experience of looking at the tankship as a sign, out there, of what is to come. Such horizonal modes could be analysed as a way of experiencing, prospecting, and coming to realise climate catastrophe 'as' something 'on' the horizon. Moreover, such horizons constitute "liberalism's governmental imaginary, its means of bracketing all forms of violence as merely unintended, accidental, and unfortunate consequences of liberal democratic unfolding" (Povinelli 2021, 41). With this imaginary at hand, the late-liberal individual can continue to look at the horizon for guiding liberal ideals against which they understand climate catastrophe, instead of recognising that their very act of looking at the horizon is part of how these catastrophes unfold and have been unfolding.

I outline Povinelli's critique and the visual sense of horizons to distinguish a politically informed sensibility that might linger however horizons are theorised, redefined, and reimagined. I do not propose to erase the concept's inevitable late-liberal hauntedness. Instead, the task is to critically circumscribe and infuse horizons with 'an otherwise' (see also Povinelli 2011; Battaglia, Almeida 2014), that is to produce differing topologies of horizons better geared for "placekeeping" amidst unfolding planetary upheavals (Gray 2023, 3). I venture that when horizons 'swell', such an otherwise of differing topologies and accompanying (re)orientations starts to emerge. These go to show how swelling horizons as a concept productively answers to a critique of 'sea-level rise' by demonstrating what Daniela Gandorfer and Zulaikha Ayub (2021, 2) call a

> *matterphorics* […] an *aesth-ethics* of thought […] committed less to a theoretical program than to a heightened attentiveness to the violence(s) already inherent in representational modes of thought and sense-making.

Hereby, 'swelling horizons' resists tendencies for concepts to be understood as 'merely' metaphorical, at-a-distance from the world they "*matter-forth*" (Povinelli, Gandorfer, Ayub 2021, 305). At first, the concept of swelling horizons may indeed strike the reader as a metaphor for better understanding histories, places, and practices at-a-distance from the concept itself. However, I intend for each of the four reorientations to lay pressure on such an intuition, demonstrating the mattering of swelling horizons both in how they form part of a world but also within the layered connotations, structure and conjoining of the words themselves.

6 Oscillating Horizons: Four Reorientations

Imagine water gathering itself into a swell of waves out at sea which eventually crash onto shore, both embodying and cascading into relations reciprocated as swelling horizons. At four different places in this movement there are reorientations. Each place constitutes an argumentative step in demonstrating why it is productive to think with swelling horizons. Exploring these places in tandem also points to how the orientations linger with and inform each other. I gesture toward these potential (dis)harmonies in each heading with 'oscillator', a device producing wave frequencies. First, I start at the littoral zone with the swell that has travelled, the swell that swashes over the shore. Here, I discuss intersecting submersions and terrestrial horizons, against which the promise of a swelling one takes shape. Second, I trace the wave backwards in time, following how it collects itself into 'a swell'. At this juncture, I critically engage with various oceanographically informed ways with which swells come to matter. Third, I verbalise and stay with the swell as movement, as 'swelling'. While the swell materialises through entangling elements, its verbing amplifies a wateriness which I explore. Fourth, now on the ocean, I explore the voluminous, densely temporal depths of swelling horizons as those which have been swelling, heavily. These four steps constitute an ecologically informed argument. Combined, the (re) orientations demonstrate ways of noticing swelling horizons which counter the colonial grammar and affective vacuity of sea-level rise.

6.1 Oscillator 1: Terrestrial Horizons and Submersion

Oceans Rising (Zyman 2021a) brings an interdisciplinary cast of scholars, activists, artists, and scientists into dialogue on issues regarding the changing oceans. The book is an attempt to understand the rising oceans differently. Simultaneously, the 'rising' is also intended to articulate the agency "that flows from and feeds into the

oceans at this precarious moment" (Zyman 2021a, 7). Ontologically, it intervenes with numerous understandings of what the oceans 'are'. Instead of the ocean being treated as a blank space in between terrestrial territories, an *aqua nullius*, focus is shifted toward theorising the materiality of the ocean 'in itself'.[26] Epistemologically and politically, throughout the book I read a commitment that, to respond to the urgency of climate change, we must approach it from a variety of knowledge-making communities and that no one such system of knowledge is sufficient for the task at hand. These epistemological and political claims are shaped by the oceanic perspective that the ontological move lends itself to. Importantly, the political claim to pluralism entails there can be no singular ontology (in the classical sense of 'the' account of being) of the ocean.

While reading *Oceans Rising*, I encountered the idea that "the horizon is swelled" in the chapter "When Above" by John Palmesino and Ann-Sofi Rönnskog (2021, 10), architects and founders of Territorial Agency. They describe crucial differences between thinking above and below water. The former is a mode of thinking relying on horizons of grids, coordinates and territories (Palmesino, Rönnskog 2021, 10), horizons serving capitalism and coloniality (Palmesino, Rönnskog 2021, 13), fashioning the planetary as a 'globe' and marking it and its peoples in terms of appropriability, exclusion and inclusion (Palmesino, Rönnskog 2021, 10; see also Yusoff 2018). Here, I understand such horizons as terrestrial horizons. I argue that terrestrial horizons are horizons of root identity. This is the case since terrestrial horizons rely on much the same grammar of territorialisation, conquest, filiations of exclusion and inclusion, violent grids of transparency, and expansion that, going back to § 3, root identity is embedded in and reproduces. When one is rooted, in a Glissantian, colonially inflected sense, one orients oneself toward terrestrial horizons.

The terrestrial horizon makes it so that places, people, and their practices are parsed through the horizon's colonial grammar. On this horizon, they are made to matter as 'to-be-(dis)possessed'. Root identity is actively maintained by legitimating it through reduction of the (racialised, colonised, sea-levelled, and affectively standardised) other to its filiating lines and grids. With sea-level rise logics, such terrestrial horizons fold notions of altitude, elevation, territory-at-sea, sea-level refugees and laboratories into them. On terrestrial horizons, the opacities of others in their worlds, politics, practices, and histories never surface, never ripple across idealised planes forecasting a changing climate, since, seen exclusively

26 Such an ontological move is also in line with a general tendency of the field of Critical Ocean Studies (DeLoughrey 2017, 42).

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through the lens of a sea-level and its terrestrial horizons, the other is assimilated to a world of sea-level rise.

However, to Palmesino and Rönnskog, something happens when below water. Here, many of the assumptions of terrestrial horizons are questioned: "Who and what can own? Can a person own another? […] Can land truly be owned?" (Palmesino, Rönnskog 2021, 10) In one sense, this is a metaphorical move of 'diving in' to imagine oneself thinking from a different place. At the same time, the material state of submersion lends itself to a different sensibility where colours and light are literally refracted and shaped by how the water moves (DeLoughrey 2017, 37). Underwater, depending on the specific climate, time also moves differently (DeLoughrey 2017, 42). These are then horizons of submersion where one is sensibly and affectively enveloped by the horizon in a way that fundamentally alters how objects become meaningful. The submersion alters the very meaning-making process, and the watery worldliness related to this is fundamentally different from the world-to-be-possessed. A call for submersion is made and a different worldliness is posited.

To concretise these differences between terrestrial horizons and submersive thinking, take the example of where the so-called 'Great Wall' separating the US and Mexico continues many metres into the waters between San Diego and Tijuana. The construction of border infrastructure particularly intensified after 9/11 as a territorial, securitised, and material part of the US-Mexican border (Herzog, Sohn 2019, 184). Such infrastructure materialises an exclusionary, violent filiation depending on what side of the line you are born on. It is thus premised on a rooted sense of identity and its accompanying terrestrial horizons. However, how might such a wall be refracted and changed when below? What difference in meaning would such a move give to this site that has been instrumental to the deaths of so many who have ventured to cross it? As a start: submersion here means that it is not only (but also, and violently so) a wall made discernible on a terrestrial horizon.

Thus, when below, the grids and territorial lines undergirding terrestrial horizons are both metaphorically and literally disrupted. In such a way, submersive thinking seems to hold the potential for tackling the problems connected to root identity. Given that the colonial grammar of root identity is my main critique of 'sea-level rise', why not stay with submersive responses to terrestrial horizons and logics of sea-level rise? While submersion provides pause for a potent change in perspective and should also be explored,[27] the concept of sea-level rise may inflect this in ways that run counter to its disruptive potential. Specifically, submersion may still invoke

27 For example, see the book *Tidalectics* (Hessler 2018).

sea-level rise in positioning itself as below past/present/future sea-levels, which can perpetuate the colonial grammar outlined above and thus, paradoxically, be subsumed under terrestrial horizons. Submersive thought can therefore still be compatible with the reductions implied by sea-level rise and may, consequently, stabilise the grids of terrestriality which it was supposed to upend. Furthermore, plummeting into oceanic thinking, submersion may also not sufficiently address the material and affective specificities of staying with the littoral zone.

Adding to such politically inflected forms of submersion, with Palmesino and Rönnskog, a third source of topologies emerges: in between terrestrial horizons and submersive perspectives lies swelling horizons. Therefore, this first reorientation oscillates out of the promise of an in-between. While Palmesino and Rönnskog only use the verb 'swell' sparsely in conjunction with 'horizon', for the remainder of this article I dwell on this initial connection, a swelling horizon, as one way of refiguring sea-level rise.[28] First, it is important to note that I take sea-level rise, this modelling, territorial, and oceanographic concept, to be one out of many ways in which the horizons are (and have been) swelling. That is, I assume that horizons are swelled by many things, sea-level rise being one, and, for instance, the changing waters of *chaos-monde* a differently disorienting and poetically loaded one.

Straight away, there is a sense in which 'swell' seems apt for describing the changing oceans. One of the main mechanisms of transforming oceans is the thermal expansion of water (Oppenheimer et al. 2019, 26). Such expansion is part of what is modelled and narrated as rising global mean sea-levels. While 'rise' and 'swell' both track the changing levels of the hydrosphere, the latter foregrounds the voluminous changes of the ocean itself, how it clings to bodies, enters homes, transforms objects, and seeps into conversations between loved ones. 'To swell' is attributed to not-only human bodies (a swelling belly, sprained ankles, infected glands, a chest swelling with pride, the bruised bodies of anti-colonial protesters, or swelling numbers of populations), sound waves intensifying to fill spaces (a swelling string section), wood's changing moisture content (an untreated bench left in the rain), or different bodies of water, be they swelling tides, coastal waters, or rivers. In short, 'to swell' has voluminous, affective, and material connotations, it is often used in connection with enlarging

28 For an approach that starts from a similar in-between without using the term 'horizon', see Macarena Gómez-Barris' work on sea edges (Gómez-Barris 2018; 2019). See also Adriana Petryna (2022) who explores *horizoning* as a way of acting upon the complex futures engendered by climate change beyond and besides how they are predicted.

waves and waters, and it is regularly used to give affective and bodily impetus to calculi of peoples and their increasing numbers.[29]

Starting from such connotations, I am interested in what conjoining these swells with horizons 'does' to horizons, not least for horizons' function in the late-liberal tense of 'out there'. Horizons 'out there' are scanned or stared at. They broaden, narrow, restrict, or expand. Given these collocations, horizons are made distant by the very habit of which verbs are chosen for them. 'Horizons swell' seems to upset these collocations, perhaps simply being a 'new' verb, perhaps because of its fleshy, voluminous connotations at odds with the distancing, epistemic use of the regular verb collocations surrounding horizons. To some, the combination of the two words might sound peculiar. Indeed, many that I have mentioned 'swelling horizons' to have reacted that it as a 'funny' meeting of words.[30] I believe that the aesthetic sense of 'peculiarity' brought forth by their conjunction is disruptive and productive. I argue that just as climate change does something to horizons, the act of conjoining horizons with the verb swell 'does' something to them. The act produces a moment of both disorientation but also a changed awareness of its normal use. In the following, I explore the oceanographic registers of this conjunction by considering the swell as a noun. That is, drawing on anthropologist Stefan Helmreich's (2023) *Book of Waves*, what 'is' a horizonal swell? [31]

29 For example, on immigration and border control, see the article by Colvin and Long "Trump Struggles with a Growing Problem on the Border" (6 April 2019) at the following link `https://www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/trump-struggles-with-a-growing-problem-on-the-border`. On food insecurity, see the article by Ntaryike "Three Million Trapped by Food Insecurity in Cameroon" (3 June 2023) at the following link `https://www.voaafrica.com/a/three-million-trapped-by-food-insecurity-in-cameroon/7118956.html`. On war refugees, see the article by Mishra "Sudan: Refugee Numbers Swell as War Continues to Drive Displacement" (11 October 2024) at the following link `https://news.un.org/en/story/2024/10/1155636`. On tourist hotspots, see the article by Skopeliti "Drunk Visitors, Rocketing Rents and Homogenised Cafes: Living in Europe's Tourist Hotspots" (13 August 2024) at the following link `https://www.theguardian.com/environment/article/2024/aug/13/drunk-visitors-rocketing-rents-homogenised-cafes-europe-tourist-hotspots`.

30 Translating 'swelling horizons' might lead to other forms of strangeness and peculiarity, thus changing how (far) the concept can be mobilised. For instance, explaining this article to people in Danish, my other main language, has raised many questions (and eyebrows) since the closest correlate is '*svulmende horisonter*', and '*svulmende*' has an erotic, bodily, and fleshy sense to it. However, in Danish it loses its demographic and oceanic connotations.

31 There are also many other places than oceanography to begin answering such a question. For instance, embodying identifying, and reacting to swells is important for surfing (see Anderson 2022; Helmreich 2023).

6.2 Oscillator 2: Swell Science

Waves are most often initiated by the transfer of energy from wind to the oceans (Helmreich 2023, 10). In oceanography, 'swell' refers to waves that are no longer influenced by the winds which created them (Helmreich 2022, 377). Thus, swells have airy origins – that elusive, often breathable element enveloping us with its varying moisture contents, "events and energy" (Horn 2018, 13). Yet, swells are not contingent on these airy spaces of creation, because the hydrosphere swells with the energies transferred to it by the wind. Waves are thus temporally and spatially extended whether "generated a month earlier on some faraway shore, by a hurricane a week earlier, and by fresh energy from wind-swept ripples" (Helmreich 2023, 12-13). This can surprise, for instance, as one of Helmreich's (2023, 229) interlocutors mention, when "swell systems […] were propagating from Greenland all the way down to the coast of Brazil […] suspending the sediment close to the beaches". Eventually, some of these swells arrive at the shore. They interact with the rising seafloor and start to break, finally swashing over the shore: "The story of waves is a tale about energy moving across space" (Helmreich 2023, 11).

Moreover, wave science operates by trying to predict various futures informed by hindcasting (Helmreich 2023, 15). In that sense, waves become media for future-telling, and wave science, while informed by its past calculations, is oriented 'forward', just as horizons often are. However, this predictive orientation presumes an abstract idea of space and time (Helmreich 2023, 15) instead of, for instance, the temporalities of the ocean embodied in multi-species interactions (DeLoughrey 2017, 40). When reading Helmreich's study of wave scientists, one story struck me from his time at a conference, talking to an oceanographer explaining the future wave climate:

> As I stood in front of Semedo's map […] an Australian wave scientist joined the conversation around the poster. He jumped up and down. Homo sapiens are driving the planet toward disaster: heat waves and fires in Australia, floods in South Asia, collapsing agricultural infrastructure in Africa, and waves, he said, of climate refugees. (Helmreich 2023, 17)

This story illustrates how oceanographers may also be immersed in swelling horizons, in this case, swelling horizons of future waves of climate refugees and an undifferentiated sense of 'Man' who is causing all this. Here again appears the figure of the climate refugee, this time affecting the body of the oceanographer in the prospected swells of their bodies.

Drawing on an elementally inflected reading of Helmreich's work, I notice kinds of horizons which are differently orienting from

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the late-liberal, terrestrial horizon. I take away the energetically temporal and spatial sense that oceanography gives to swelling horizons: swelling horizons ripple across distances and times. Wave science also demonstrates a predictive, forward-looking way in which swellings are actively utilised to alter the expectation-horizons of the oceans. Importantly, the narration of climate refugees by the wave scientist, provides an important note of caution that such swelling horizons may well also orient us differently towards toxicities where demographics are given affect by indicating the fluidity of the racialised other, literally writing [*graphos*] people [*demos*] into swells. Finally, the elemental intersection of wind, water, and the littoral's muddle begs the question: What is the role of the elemental when noticing swelling horizons?

I do not believe there is any singular answer to this question. As Povinelli might respond, an answer would have to start within "the forces of history rather than with a claim about ontology" (Povinelli 2021, 2). In that spirit, an answer does emerge from Epeli Hau'ofa's article "Our Sea of Islands" (1994) in response to the reduction of Oceania to small terrestrial island states which I critiqued in § 3. The Pacific Islands Forum (2017) also referenced this article directly when they introduced the notion of the Blue Pacific. Hau'ofa (1994, 151) reacts against a deterministic view of the Pacific as "too small, too poor, and too isolated to develop any meaningful degree of autonomy". Instead, Hau'ofa (1994, 160) foregrounds the vast, expansive sea of islands to inspire new agencies and overturn deterministic terrestrial hegemonies. Hereby, Hau'ofa starts from the sea to create a different position for its peoples on those islands that are part of its vast expanse. This points to the importance of refusing a history of regarding the water of the oceans as a blank space to be traversed on the path to the next piece of land but instead acknowledge and think the oceans themselves in their intensities and affectivities.

Regardless of which element(s) take up attention when noticing swelling horizons, I do maintain that, when focusing on their waters, the coloniality which often permeates discourses surrounding 'sea-level rise' should be counteracted and critically circumscribed. As a technical heuristic, 'sea-level rise' performs an important role, but, following § 3, we should be wary of its presence in many Global North narratives surrounding the changing oceans and its frontline communities. In the following, I linger with these watery dependencies of swelling horizons and explore them in their wateriness. So, and this brings me to the next reorientation, what 'is' the water of swelling horizons? Here, instead of tracing the swells of horizons, I trace them 'as swelling', as watery movement.

6.3 Oscillator 3: Taking Body as, in, of (and on) Swelling Horizons

Because of the voluminous, bodily sense of 'to swell', the swelling horizon may bear a watery sense of embodiment. Nevertheless, since horizons emerge out of reciprocal relations between bodies and their environments, this embodiment also seems difficult to determine as particular bodies. As backdrop, boundary, and reciprocity, the horizon seems to be the condition of a *topos*, yet a swelling one also bears a sense of embodiment, the inhabiting of a *topos*. How might this paradox be unpacked and with it, the sense of peculiarity brought forth by conjoining backdrop and embodiment? I believe part of an answer may be found in Neimanis' (2017) idea of 'bodies of water'. Neimanis (2017, 5) theorises watery embodiment to address how we are unevenly implicated in the woundedness of planetary waters, the "[w]orsening droughts and floods, aquifer depletion, groundwater contamination and salination, ocean acidification, as well as commodification and privatization schemes that too narrowly seek to direct water's flows". I take from Neimanis' (2017, 95) figuration the idea that watery embodiment does not only mean that bodies need water to exist, but also that "water needs a body – it needs to take up expression as bodies of water that are specifically situated, even in all of their porous transits". Water never exists 'as such', independently of its surroundings, but must always take up a body depending on its situatedness. However, this does not lead to the situatedness 'determining' the water as a body, since water nourishes the new, the not-yet (Neimanis 2017, 103). Therefore, while bodies often need water, water also needs indeterminate bodies, always open to an otherwise.

This indeterminacy of bodies of water helps unpack the paradox between swell and horizon, between bodily becomings and their conditionings. As bodies of water, swelling horizons are inherently indeterminate, always open to an otherwise. Such an insight is in line with the sense of surprise and the peculiar character produced by the conjoining of swell and horizon. Furthermore, it resonates with this article's aim to infuse horizons with an otherwise. In their swells, the horizons' waters need to make themselves as bodies of water. This entails that swelling horizons (taken up in their watery facets) necessarily function through ongoing processes of materialisation and differentiation because of the varied bodies that their waters need to take shape as. It also means that swelling horizons lend themselves to prepositions differing from those normally used with horizons, further rupturing the collocations of horizons' common verb pairings. Instead of only being 'on' the horizon, various bodies of water can also be as, in, or of a horizon's swelling.

Theorising the oceans' water in a way that leads to changes in potential prepositions clarifies how the line of the swelling horizon wobbles with bodies that constantly materialise and differentiate within it. Being on the swell is premised on having, for instance, a (not deadly crammed) boat, a house that does not float away, a levee holding fast, or a history where colonisers have not exploited and overwritten one's long-standing ways of traversing the swells. In these ways, bodies as, in, or of swelling horizons tend to be submerged, often violently so, processes themselves subtended by differentiated power structures. Understanding swelling horizons as watery and as unfolding processes of embodiment, registers the fleshy, necropolitical, and material realities surrounding how numbers of people may also literally swell, for instance in and across the Mediterranean Sea as bloated, wounded bodies swollen from the immense, intentionally devastating warscape of Fortress Europe (see Walia 2021). The prepositional relation one bears with respect to swelling horizons is then suffused with, as a start; necropolitics, predatory exploitation, racial capitalism, and histories of intentional underdevelopment (Mbembe 2003; Hickel et al. 2022; Fraser 2018; Rodney 1981).

Therefore, this third reorientation starts from multiple prepositional engagements with the changing oceans and an acknowledgement that such prepositions are not neutral. I now turn to senses of 'swelling' that emphasise how oceans have already been swelling, heavily, for hundreds of years. In their swells, horizons are not only forward oriented but also swell of waste, both as "Heavy Waters" (DeLoughrey 2010) and in their "unbearable heaviness" (Sultana 2022).

6.4 Oscillator 4: Having Swelled, Heavily

With this fourth oscillator, I think with swelling horizons in the present perfect continuous tense: how they 'have been swelling'. This analytic move highlights that there is no pre-given, temporal cutoff point to when a swelling horizon begins (and ends, for that matter). It points to what I have, following Farhana Sultana (2022), analysing as 'climate coloniality' and, with DeLoughrey (2019), as how the violences of climate change are not necessarily new but also continuous with those of coloniality. Specifically, Sultana attempts to ground studies of climate coloniality in the lived experiences of those enduring its ongoing heaviness (Sultana 2022, 3). This embodiment anchors climate coloniality in the lived experiences expressed through a plethora of "theories, empirics, emotions, and storytelling" (Sultana 2022, 11). Thus, Sultana proposes a heaviness drawing together these experiences, a heaviness unbearable to those

already suffering from the multiple environmental devastations of colonialisms past and present and a heaviness which is integral to considering the dense depths of horizons in their swells.

With Glissant (1997, 6) and Sharpe (2016), a heaviness like this perhaps begins in and is reanimated through the enslaving (today also, yet not only, recurring as trafficking) ship's "womb abyss", its hold, and in the depths of the sea. Following Sultana, it is important to listen for and speak about the heaviness of climate coloniality to confront it (Sultana 2022, 10). In turn, I hope that if this heaviness is thought as part of horizonal swellings, such acts of listening and speaking are integrated from the very start instead of sea-level rise's risk of affectively standardising those vulnerable to climate coloniality. While such heaviness indicates an affective and experiential component, DeLoughrey's (2010) reference to heavy waters helps emphasise a material sense in which horizons have been swelling.

With 'heavy waters', DeLoughrey suggests that the oceans are both heavy with 'our' waste but also how they are heavy with the wasted lives of, among others, enslaved people and refugees. In the first sense, the oceans have been used as dumping grounds for nuclear waste, plastics, and heavy metals. This forms a cycle. The oceans are humanised by absorbing our waste which, in turn, moves the waste around and layers the heavy metals "in marine mammals and human beings" (DeLoughrey 2010, 707-8). The second sense points to the lives (still being) lost at sea during (enduring) colonialisms (DeLoughrey 2010, 708).[32] The connecting (literal and poetic, non-metaphorical) mark between the two senses is, to DeLoughrey, Glissant's (1997, 6) writing about "balls and chains gone green". While DeLoughrey has a focus on Caribbean literature, I find it important to underscore the materiality of these balls and chains; their durability and colour, the wrists they have touched, and how their presence now forms part of ecosystems on the sea floor, still there. That is, how the balls and chains contribute, in their voluminous presence on the seafloor, to a swelling horizon. The following examples register presences like this.

Take how the horizon swells in the wake of Atlantic chattel slavery, with "those Africans thrown, jumped, dumped overboard in Middle Passage; they are with us still […] in hydrogen, in oxygen; in carbon, in phosphorous, and iron; sodium and chlorine" (Sharpe 2016, 19). When writing about Black life in the enduring wake of enslaving ships, their residence time, Sharpe (2016, 40-1) reflects with geologist and oceanographer Anne Gardulski on how oceans

32 Note that in *Allegories of the Anthropocene*, DeLoughrey goes on to analyse "wasted life" more broadly as a way of "foreground[ing] the political and social systems that deem certain humans 'matter out of place' [as wasted life]" (DeLoughrey 2019, 103).

most likely still contain "the atoms of those people who were thrown overboard" since "human blood is salty and sodium, Gardulski tells me, has a residence time of 260 million years". In the Glissantian sense, Sharpe's 'wake work' enacts its own poetics by powerfully affecting the reader all the while better imagining modern reality's rootedness in the abyss of enslaving ships. Similarly, the very vastness of the Atlantic still lends itself to a thriving slave trade being concealed along the same middle passage (Zyman 2021b, 37). And, in geology, the Orbis spike in 1610 has been proposed to name the advent of the Anthropocene due to atmospheric changes and a mass cross-continental swapping of species (Lewis, Maslin 2015). To Neimanis (2017, 166), the onset of the current geologic era must therefore be considered in connection with the colonial violence that was inextricable from this time-period. These are oceans swelling with trauma which affects and materialises present conditions of (mal)nourishment and (lacking) liveability.

7 A Pause for Conclusions: Swelling Horizons as Lowly Thinking

Sociologist and cultural studies scholar Paul Gilroy (2018, 4) has given a lecture arguing in favour of "sea level theory". We must do "lowly watery" thinking against the high-altitude theorising sometimes employed by scholars of the Anthropocene (Gilroy 2018, 10). I have followed Gilroy's lowly movement of staying at the littoral, at the interfacing of the elements. However, in staying with and at swelling horizons, I also refuse lowly thinking 'at the sea-level', at least when such orienting elicits affective standardisations, terrestrially biased modes of thought, logics of territoriality and (dis)possession, and violent reductions of others. Neither terrestrial, nor fully submerged, I propose reorientations, in lowly thinking, with and towards horizons that have been, are, and will be swelling.

In this article, I have argued that the reorientations entail infusing late-liberal horizons with an otherwise, here activated by noticing them for how they swell. The energy of swelling horizons ripple across varying distances and temporalities. They swell from both the energies of the wind, the rising temperatures of the oceans, the glaciers that melt, and heavy metals. They swell from balls and chains gone green on the seabed, thus expressing moments fundamentally entwined with the Anthropocene's possible beginnings. While such horizons in their swellings are voluminous, watery, and enveloping, the term 'horizon' give them a lingering sense of an 'out there'. Thus, swelling horizons maintain a tension between an 'out there' and how they, as watery, are always specifically situated by materialising as various bodies of water. One can be 'as, of and in' swelling horizons,

not only on them. Perhaps, a different decolonially inflected mode of the 'out there' is activated with swelling horizons. To be clear, I do not believe the above orientations are the only ones carried by swelling horizons. Nor do I claim that each orientation is limited to how this paper has described them. They are all necessarily open-ended. As swells, they oscillate and (dis)harmonise at various frequencies. Nonetheless, I do maintain that they each articulate and stay with the tensions of swelling horizons in new ways, a project vital for refiguring changing oceans which never quite conform to the all-too-simple logic of the sea-level.

I conclude by returning to *Oceans Rising* (2021a) and the exhibition that it accompanies called *Oceans in Transformation*. On the façade of the exhibition building, the church of San Lorenzo in Venice, was a line of light that depicted a projected sea rise of 4.5 m, halfway up the church gate. While the line is the product of models and their interpretations, when it materialised on the door, the entrant was faced with the uneasy feeling of being above when below. There, a present seemed actively (un)made by a future partly submerged. Territorial Agency (2021, 46) writes that this causes a "pivot from terrestrial to oceanic thinking". They describe a defined movement, a pivot, from one clearly named mode of thinking to another clearly named mode of thinking. Yet, I wager that the productive aspect of such an entrée is rather that it creates an ambiguous, peculiar space both for reorienting ourselves, but also for recontextualising and wobbling the lines surrounding us. At that place, the way the modelled sea-level rise materialised seems to embody the tensions and ambiguities of swelling horizons. Indeed, underneath that projected line, 'sea-level rise' as concept and socio-political construction also seems to swell horizons.

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