

FAIR WINDS AND FOLLOWING SEAS: DIGITAL FLOATING HOMELANDS AS COMMUNITY RESILIENCE TO THE CLIMATE CRISIS

As the climate crisis and rising sea levels encroach on land and communities, what can the digital realm offer as a place of refuge and community? How can these online spaces be resilient?

DEFINITIONS:

Floating Homeland

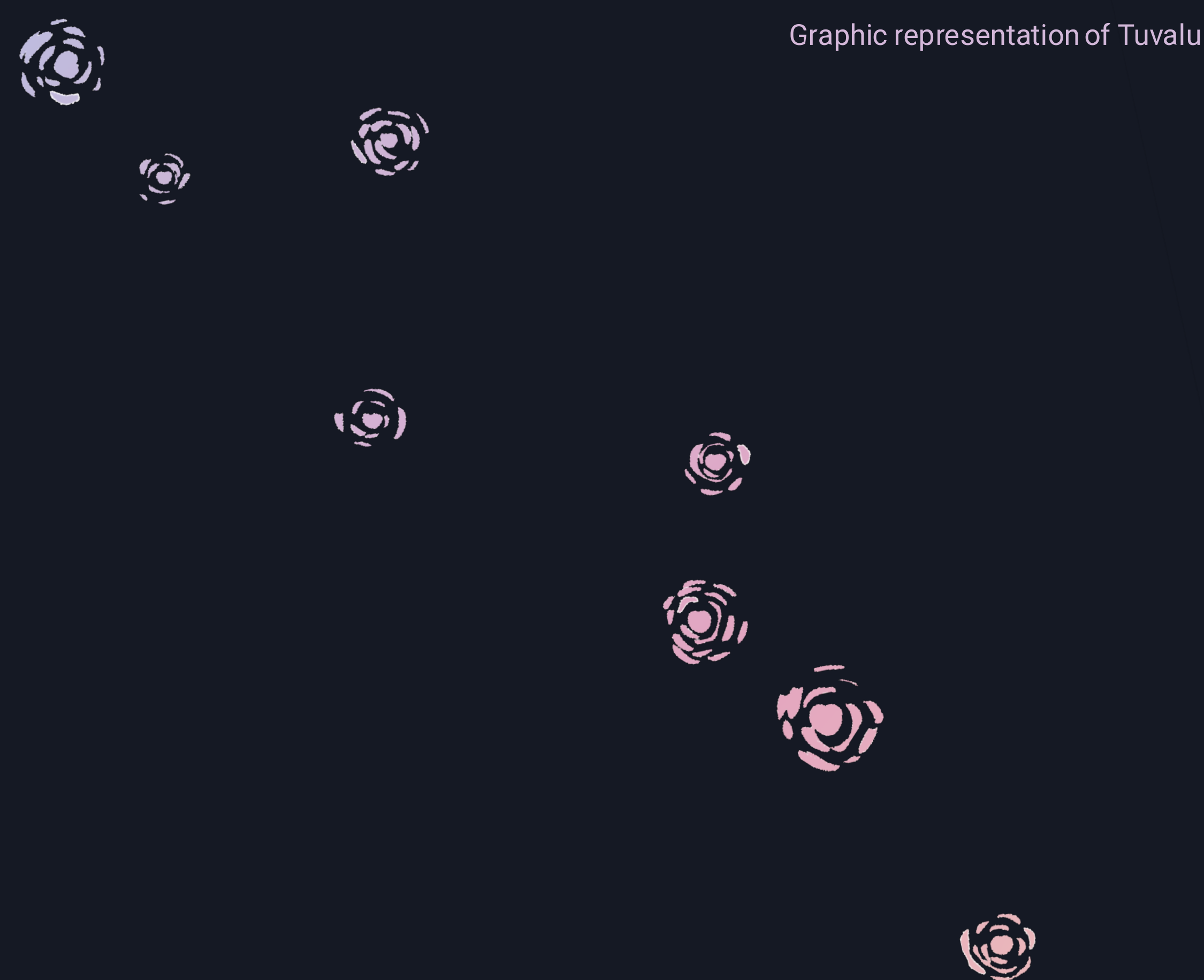
A concept identifying a metaphysical space of connection for community beyond physical boundaries. The floating homeland is a space usually developed in diaspora, exile, and/or exclusion. (Danticat, 2010)

Digital Floating Homeland

A digital space, either real or conceptual, that allows for people to connect online, thereby bypassing colonial divisions, physical barriers, diaspora, exile, and exclusion. The floating homeland is a space, particularly for those living under settler colonial systems, where communities can engage with each other autonomously. (Shehadeh, 2023)

Digital Colonialism

Exploitation of the Global South by means of multinational corporations controlling digital infrastructures, the collection and exploitation of data, imposition and control of use, and parasitic power structures. (Kewt, 2018)



Tuvalu, the digital nation

As an island nation in the Pacific, Tuvalu has long recognized the danger that the climate crisis and sea level rise has on them. Despite calling for global action to stymie the crisis, it has not been enough, and Tuvalu has found it necessary to digitize itself to create an online proxy and digital replica to ensure that its statehood, rights, and culture are maintained and kept accessible.

“The world has not acted, and so we in the Pacific have had to act... As our land disappears, we have no choice but to become the world’s first digital nation.”

Simon Kofe, COP27 Address

Tuvalu intends to conduct its governmental, legal, and cultural affairs in the cloud. However, the lack of regulations for the digitization and stewardship are of great concern. What protections are in place to prevent the multinational corporations that are taking part in the digitization, storage, and dispersal of the digital nation’s content from acting in their own interests and reinforcing colonialism in a digital space? How can communities, who find safety in a digital floating homeland protect themselves against the reinforcement and imposition of digital colonialism?

“Without a global conscience, and a global commitment to our shared wellbeing, we may soon find the rest of the world joining us online as their lands disappear.”

Simon Kofe, COP27 Address

Discussion

Considering the importance of digitization in response to the climate crisis, how do we reconcile it with the impact of negative impact digitization and cloud storage on the environment?

What can digital floating homelands do to make themselves more resilient?

How can Digital Floating Homelands protect themselves from AI?

I recognize that this work was conducted while attending the University of British Columbia, located on the unceded, stolen, and occupied territory of the hən̓q̓əmi̓n̓əm-speaking Musqueam people. UBC continues to perpetuate genocide and colonial violence on Turtle Island and internationally and I call upon UBC to divest from and boycott institutions and companies that invest in genocide.

As you engage in this conference, remember that there are no universities left in Gaza, and that libraries, archives, museums, journalists, and information workers have been targeted in efforts to destroy Palestinian culture and impede access to knowledge and information. No one is free until we are all free. Free Palestine!

Resources

- Danticat, Edwidge. *Create Dangerously: The Immigrant Artist at Work*. New York: Vintage, 2010.
- Kwet, Michael. "Digital Colonialism: US Empire and the New Imperialism in the Global South." SSRN Electronic Journal, 2018. doi:10.2139/ssrn.3232297.
- Shehadeh, Hanine. 2023. "Palestine in the Cloud: The Construction of a Digital Floating Homeland" *Humanities* 12, no. 4: 75. <https://doi.org/10.3390/h12040075>
- Tuvalu | *The first digital nation*. (2022). Retrieved from <https://www.tuvalu.tv/>