

“We started climate change”

A Multi-level ethnography of Pacific Climate Leadership

Camilla A. Borrevik

Thesis for the Degree of Philosophiae Doctor (PhD)
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Abstract

Based on fieldwork in multiple locations around the world but with a particular focus on the Pacific Islands region, this dissertation explores ethnographically the global phenomena of anthropogenic climate change and their disparate local implications. For Pacific Islanders, the term ‘climate change’ encompasses a wide array of experiences and understandings, ranging from everyday struggles with floods, to intergovernmental negotiations on a global scale at the United Nations. In this study, I set out to explore how climate change unfolds in the Pacific region not only as environmental impact, but as part of political processes, within documents and as political position-making. The latter refers to the advances made by Pacific countries nationally, regionally, and globally in order to position themselves within global climate change discourse and international climate change decision-making.

The study draws on ethnographic fieldwork carried out in the Pacific countries of Palau, Fiji, and Solomon Islands, as well as at the Third International Meeting on Small Island Developing States (UNSIDS) in Samoa, 2014, and international climate negotiations at the Conference of the Parties (COP) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in 2015 (COP21, Paris), 2016 (COP22, Marrakech) and 2017 (COP23, Bonn). Based on these diverse field sites, I suggest an approach to climate change as a relation; in which capacity it is something that connects us and in the process is created and re-created. As such, this study explores knowledges and linkages between local understandings of climate change and international processes at different levels. The point of departure is an argument that Pacific stories about climate change convey forms of knowledge and insights into aspects of life that international climate change processes frequently separate out or ignore altogether.

Notions of storytelling, kinship, place and sociality are important in Pacific knowledge-sharing practices and are therefore at the centre of this analysis. I propose the concept of *Pacific climate change stories*, which reflects the empirical cases presented and convey experienced local realities of climate change. In terms of theoretical and methodological contributions, the study demonstrates the applicability of an analytical approach that conceptually expands on Pacific notions of stories and storytelling. These forms of narrative and rhetorical genres serve as important tools for

creating the relation required in order to get others to understand what climate change means for Pacific Islanders. The sharing of a story may serve as a powerful tool to connect climate change to place and people.

The study contributes to contemporary scholarly debates on climate change within anthropology and responds to methodological calls for in-depth empirical research. By taking an approach of ‘studying through’, the focus is on decision makers, institutions and bureaucracies, as well as ‘on the ground’ events, situations, and contexts in Palau, Solomon Islands, and elsewhere, including on the scale of the Pacific as a particular social, cultural and political region of the world. Through this method, entanglements in Pacific island countries between ‘grassroots’ and ‘elites’, as well as politics and kinship, emerge, reflecting a density of global-local connections. Despite the study’s analytical advancement of a multi-level, multi-sited and multi-scalar ethnography, I argue for a renewed notion of locality that postulates exactly such global entanglement and multi-scalarness. Ideas of ‘the local’ can in that sense take on new meanings and purposes, as they ‘travel’ through stories and people. The relationship between people and place becomes increasingly important due to the strong ‘global imaginary’ of climate change, yet with highly unequal local implications.

A further elaboration of these arguments reveals that through the development of a distinctive Pacific climate diplomacy, a conversion of Pacific climate change stories takes place and gains influence in the realm of global climate governance. Stories of climate change as expressed in different forms by Pacific delegates at the global stages, carry the authority of lived experiences of climate change in multifaceted ways and represent a distinctive authenticity in COP settings. Hence I argue that Pacific delegations have developed a strategy to create spaces at COPs to voice concerns and incorporate formal mechanisms that make place relevant and value Pacific-based approaches of knowledge-sharing. This strategy stands in contrast to the often system-heavy and bureaucratic processes characterising the UN systems. In a desire to move away from existing system-oriented practices, Pacific countries have developed a greater Pacific regional voice, and a distinct regional approach of Pacific climate leadership. This involves the building of global positioning of the Pacific in climate change politics, and requires a specific repertoire of a Pacific climate diplomacy.

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List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

| | |
|--------|--|
| AAA | American Anthropological Association |
| ACP | African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States |
| ADB | Asian Development Bank |
| AF | Adaptation Fund |
| AOSIS | Alliance of Small Island Developing States |
| APA | Ad Hoc Working Group on the Paris Agreement |
| AR5 | IPCC Fifth Assessment Report |
| CAT | Civic Action Team |
| CIA | Central Intelligence Agency |
| CMA | Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Paris Agreement |
| CMP | Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Kyoto Protocol |
| COFA | Compact of Free Association |
| COP | Conference of the Parties |
| CROP | Council of Regional Organisations in the Pacific |
| ECOPAS | European Consortium for Pacific Studies |
| EEZ | Exclusive Economic Zone |
| EIG | Environmental Integrity Group |
| EIT | Economies in transition |
| EU | European Union |
| FFA | Forum Fisheries Agency |
| FRDP | Framework for Resilient Development in the Pacific |
| FSMed | Fiji School of Medicine |
| GCCA | Global Climate Change Alliance |
| GCF | Green Climate Fund |
| GEF | Global Environment Facility |
| GFDRR | Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery |
| GIZ | Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit |
| HAC | high Ambition Coalition |
| IGO | Intergovernmental Organizations |
| IISD | International Institute for Sustainable Development |
| INDC | Intended Nationally Determined Contribution |
| IPCC | Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change |
| IUCN | International Union for Conservation of Nature |
| JICA | Japan International Cooperation Agency |
| LDC | Least Developed Countries |
| LFA | Logical Framework Approach |
| MDG | Millennium Development Goals |
| MFA | Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Norway |
| MSG | Melanesian Spearhead Group |
| NAPA | National Adaptation Programme of Action |
| NDC | National Determined Contributions |
| NEPC | National Environmental Protection Council |

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| NES | National Environment Service |
| NGO | Non-Governmental Organisations |
| NIE | National Implementing Entities |
| OCTs | Overseas Countries and Territories |
| OECD | Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development |
| OEK | Olbiil Era Kelulau |
| OERC | Office of Environmental Response and Coordination |
| PACC | Pacific Adaptation to Climate Change Programme |
| PAN | Protected Areas Network |
| PASO | Pacific Aviation Safety Office |
| PCAA | Pacific Community Action Agency |
| PCC | Pacific Council of Churches |
| PCCP | Palau Climate Change Policy For Climate and Disaster Resilient Low Emissions Development |
| PCCSP | Pacific Climate Change Science Program |
| PCS | Palau Conservation Society |
| PDD | Product Design Documents |
| PFTAC | Pacific Financial Technical Assistance Centre |
| PIDF | Pacific Islands Development Forum |
| PIDP | Pacific Islands Development Programme |
| PIF | Pacific Islands Forum |
| PIFACC | Pacific Islands Framework for Action on Climate Change |
| PIFS | Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat |
| PIFS | Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat |
| PNG | Papua New Guinea |
| PPA | Pacific Power Association |
| PSIDS | Pacific Small Island Developing States |
| REDD | United Nations Programme on Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation |
| SAMOA Pathway | Small Island Developing States Accelerated Modalities of Action [S.A.M.O.A.] Pathway |
| SDG | Sustainable Development Goals |
| SIDS | Small Island Developing State |
| SIS | Smaller Island States |
| SPC | Secretariat of the Pacific Community |
| SPREP | Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme |
| SPTP | South Pacific Tourism Organisation |
| TNC | The Nature Conservancy |
| UN | United Nations |
| UNCBD | United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity |
| UNCCD | United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification |
| UNDP | United Nations Development Programme |
| UNEP | United Nations Environment |
| UNESCO | United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization |
| UNFCCC | United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change |
| UNGA | United Nations General Assembly |

| | |
|-------|--|
| UNSC | United Nations Security Council |
| USA | United States of America |
| USAID | United States Agency for International Development |
| USP | University of South Pacific |
| WGIP | United Nations Working Group on Indigenous Populations |
| WIM | Warsaw Mechanism for Loss and Damage |

Preface

This research is based on nearly eighteen months of fieldwork from 2013 to 2017, primarily in the Pacific Islands (Palau, Solomon Islands, Fiji), but also at United Nations (UN) conferences (UN-SIDS, COP21, COP22, COP23). The latter group of locations was not a given when I started my PhD journey, and it is fair to say that such unexpected fieldwork opportunities have greatly influenced the outcome of the research that constitutes this study. In particular, the combination of different field sites has forced me to continuously rethink how one is to understand climate change in each location and between them. The final result, manifested here in the following seven chapters, is an anthropological study of climate change knowledges and linkages between local understandings of climate change and international processes at different levels.

To illustrate, I wish to start with a short analogy of the use of logos. In 2017, Fiji served as the Presidency of COP23, which is the 23rd Conference of the Parties (COP) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). These conferences aim to be a “concerted effort to confront the problem of climate change” (COP23 2017a). Since the first COP in 1995 in Berlin, the country serving as Presidency has rotated among the five UN regions of Africa, Asia-Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean, Eastern Europe, and Western Europe and Others. COP23 was the first time a Pacific country – or, if using the categorisation of the UN, a Small Island Developing State (SIDS) - took on the COP Presidency role. It was also the first time the official logo of the conference visualised how climate change has had an impact on a country.

While previous logos have included a globe, a tree, a leaf, or a national monument of the host country, the COP23 logo was different. It showed a small island with two palm trees partially submerged by the ocean and a large impending wave coming towards it:



(UNFCCC/COP 2017)

According to the official explanation provided by the Fiji Presidency, the wave was in the form of a cyclone and symbolised the country's recent experience with Cyclone Winston in 2016 (Bainimarama 2017). It was the most powerful cyclone ever to have made landfall in the southern hemisphere and affected more than 540,000 people just in Fiji, in addition to several other Pacific Islands. The logo design was the result of a national competition and the reason for why this particular design won, was, according to Fijian Prime Minister Frank Bainimarama, because "it captures perfectly the vulnerability to climate change of a small island developing state like Fiji" (Bainimarama 2017). The logo was important, as it would be "seen by billions of people around the world" (Bainimarama 2017).

My point is this: The logos used for the UN climate change conferences in previous years visualised climate change frequently as a globe or objects such as a tree, while the logo for COP23 was trying to capture a concrete example of the actual problems climate change causes for Fijians and other island countries. What this shows is that there is a difference in how climate change here is presented through perceived impacts drawing on recent Fijian experiences, versus a "global imagery" (Ingold, 1993:35) that has been argued to be "detached from the domain of lived experience" (Ingold, 1993:31). This analogy goes to the heart of many of the issues engaged with in this dissertation, which is how Pacific people draw on their own experiences and vernacular models of sociality, and thereby also storytelling, to influence others on matters concerning climate change.

A week after starting the PhD I was in Fiji for my first round of fieldwork and I would like to provide a quick anecdote from my visit to further elaborate on my point. Early one morning my two Fijian guides and I headed towards the Rewa district to visit some of the villages in the area. The Rewa River runs from the central high lands of Viti Levu and down to the ocean creating a large delta area. Located close to the river and its flood plains many of the villages are prone to flooding. The best way to get to them is by boat on the river, so the guides and I jumped on board a boat taxi. The Rewa River spreads out with large palm trees and lush green vegetation on both sides. While sitting in the boat and enjoying the view, I noticed the erosion on both sides of the riverbank, exposing large roots of trees. When going ashore at the location of the first

village, the erosion was so bad that I nearly fell backwards into the river while trying to get from the beach to the grassy area where the houses were located. We then made our way to meet the Chief in the community house and to have the *Yaqona* (kava) ceremony to talk about the purpose of our visit. Once inside, one of the guides presented me as a climate change researcher and noted that I wished to see how the village was affected by climate change. The Chief nodded his head and it did not take long until we were standing outside with a whole group of people from the village who wanted to show us around.

The first story I was told in the village was how they were looking to move the community house because it frequently got flooded. A man held up his finger to a point on the outside wall to show where the latest flood had reached. As we walked further inside the village, accompanied by an ever-growing number of children, people came out from their houses to talk to us. One woman eagerly showed me her small garden on the backside of her house that was more like a small swamp of mud and a few green plants sticking out. She explained to me that she could not grow anything there anymore; it was far too muddy as a result of the saltwater making its way into the soil. Nearly every house we passed as we made our way around the village had marks of water along the side showing signs of the last flood. As we spent the rest of the day going from one village to the next, similar stories were conveyed everywhere we went.

My first experience attending a UN climate conference in Paris in 2015 for COP21 was quite a different one. Although the topic of the conference was negotiating how to confront problems of climate change, the stories about problems, such as the ones I had been told in the Fijian villages, were scantily present. As a result, and at this point halfway in my fieldwork, I was perplexed by what at first seemed disconnected situations: Why did I have the sensation that talking about climate change with people in the Pacific and climate change at UN conferences were such disparate issues? Eventually I discovered that similar senses of disconnect are shared among many people in the Pacific, and I soon realised that they were insights rather than signs of my own confusion.

I attended the COPs as part of the Republic of Palau Delegation and thereby gained insights into how Pacific delegates themselves work to establish forms of

connections through, amongst other channels, climate diplomacy. Exploring Pacific approaches to overcome notions of divergence in climate change issues and to tell their story is therefore a central focus of this study.

This dissertation consists of seven chapters and an epilogue. Chapter 1 provides the introduction and in many ways sets the scene for the rest of the chapters. Here I explain my overarching analytical approach and the concept of *Pacific climate change stories*, which is based on my interlocutors' own accounts that arise from local ethnographic realities of climate change and referred to by them as 'stories'. Chapter 1 further explains how Pacific climate change stories are part of an attempt to create a relation between the Pacific Islands and global decision-making processes. Inspired by Marilyn Strathern's (1995) understanding of a relation as knowledge, I suggest approaching climate change as knowledge and as the production of knowledge. The reason why such a relation is important connects to a number of challenges that Pacific Islanders face related to climate change and that I have divided into four parts in Chapter 1: facing, knowing, telling and connecting. These four parts provide an outline of major challenges, as well as showing some of the ways Pacific Islanders are providing solutions and responses.

In Chapter 2, I draw on recent anthropological writings that call for an increased role of the discipline within climate change research and establish my own contribution through this study. I argue that by applying a methodological and analytical framework that explores climate change complexities across multiple scales and levels, it opens up the possibility to study important entanglements of global and local dimensions.

Chapter 3 offers an analysis of complexities through a presentation of three ethnographic cases in each of which climate change is a central part of the story, but that in differing ways illustrate some of the multifaceted dimensions of climate change. Through exploring issues of discourse and knowledge, I show difficulties in applying the term 'climate change' in Pacific vernacular languages and how Pacific Islanders have been portrayed as powerless victims in global narratives. Yet, ongoing attempts are made by Pacific island people to counter such marginalising framings and influence public discourse. I therefore argue that the three cases I describe in Chapter 3 illustrate powerful dimensions of climate change as knowledge and, by extension, that these

provide foundations of Pacific climate change stories that then make their way from the Pacific Islands to the UN climate negotiations.

Chapter 4 turns the attention to national decision-making and socio-political contexts of one particular Pacific island country, namely Palau, in order to illustrate how some Pacific countries are taking international leadership roles within areas of conservation and climate action. During the establishment of the world's first nationwide Marine Sanctuary covering 80 percent of Palau's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), Palau's President, Tommy Remengesau Jr, declared in 2015 that it was "Our time to lead". By drawing on this recent example in addition to the impact of Palau's colonial history and post-independence developments, the chapter shows why and how there is a strong desire to carry out acts of global leadership. It also offers insights into important social and cultural characteristics that explain features within a broader Pacific climate diplomacy, which include stories as knowledge, distinctive relational aspects of Pacific societies, and the importance of these in a configuration of the Pacific person.

Chapter 5 suggests that current ways of knowledge-sharing practices formally set up through climate change projects, programmes and reporting mechanisms, transforms Pacific climate change experiences into language and forms that fit with certain reporting criteria or document aesthetics. It reflects a system-oriented process where the requirements for information and stylistic forms transform Palauans' distinctive social realities and local climate change stories. Nevertheless, these knowledge-sharing practices are what dominates and constitute much of the cross-regional and international exchanges. By turning the attention towards the drafting of documents, the gathering of information, and the selection of data, I suggest that it reveals an ambition for knowledge-sharing that somewhat ironically also sets in motion an abatement of information due to the use of standards that manage the social realities of Palauans into 'manageable realities'.

This idea is furthered in Chapter 6, where I show how many Pacific Islanders wish to move away from what is considered system-heavy and bureaucratic processes, particularly those of the UN. This desire has led to the development of a greater Pacific regional voice and a regional strategy of Pacific climate leadership. This involves, I

argue, establishing a global positioning of the Pacific in climate change politics and a specific repertoire of a Pacific climate diplomacy.

Yet, nothing can draw the levels, scales and arguments of the previous chapters together as the Conference of the Parties (COP). In the final chapter, Chapter 7, I therefore draw the strands of arguments together and analyse UNFCCC conference processes, configurations of power and meeting forms. In this extended chapter, I discuss and explore the spaces and opportunities for Pacific position-making at the three 2015-2017 UN climate negotiations COP21 in Paris, COP22 in Marrakech, and COP23 in Bonn. Pacific delegates are becoming increasingly well-versed in their ability to navigate their way within this complex global climate system. The chapter argues that Pacific countries are incorporating recognisable Pacific aspects of culture and sociality into UN climate negotiations as an essential part of developing a form of Pacific climate diplomacy. This includes an emphasis on stories, place-based knowledge and identity, most recently and prominently shown during Fiji's role as the COP Presidency in 2017-2018.

And lastly, the Epilogue provides a reflection around some of the findings of the study and serves as an opportunity to look further ahead for future areas of inquiry and the role of anthropology in climate change research. The Epilogue also serves as an opportunity for more personalised reflections in the aftermath of COP24 in Poland, and contemplation around my own experiences through this PhD journey.

Finally, I wish to provide a word about some of the terms I use. The UNFCCC has defined climate change as "a change of climate which is attributed directly or indirectly to human activity that alters the composition of the global atmosphere and which is in addition to natural climate variability observed over comparable time periods" (UNFCCC 1992). This however differs from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) definition stating that "Climate change refers to a change in the state of the climate that can be identified" and that "Climate change may be due to natural internal processes or *external forcings*" (original emphasis, IPCC, 2014:120). Whereas the UNFCCC definition attributes human cause as the sole reason for climate change, the IPCC definition includes any climate change irrespective of the cause behind it. When using 'climate change' in the text, I have followed the approach of

Mike Hulme in that the term refers to “a past, present or future change in climate, with the implication that the predominant – but not exclusive – cause of this change is human in origin” (2009:xxxviii-xxxix). I also take note that other terms, such as ‘global warming’, are also used in public discourse and by some interlocutors when referring to climate change. On a technical level, these terms have different formal scientific definitions.¹ However, my experience has been that these terms often have been used somewhat interchangeably and hence I have not included an etymological analysis of all the different terms as that would go beyond my aim here.

A note on style

Throughout the study I have used double quotation marks to indicate direct quotation of either interlocutors or other written works. I have used italics for vernacular or emic terms, but sometimes also for emphasis. Single quotation marks have been applied to indicate analytic terms or scare quotes. Attributions of maps, photos, and figures have been provided where necessary. Where no attributions are given, the photos and figures are my own.

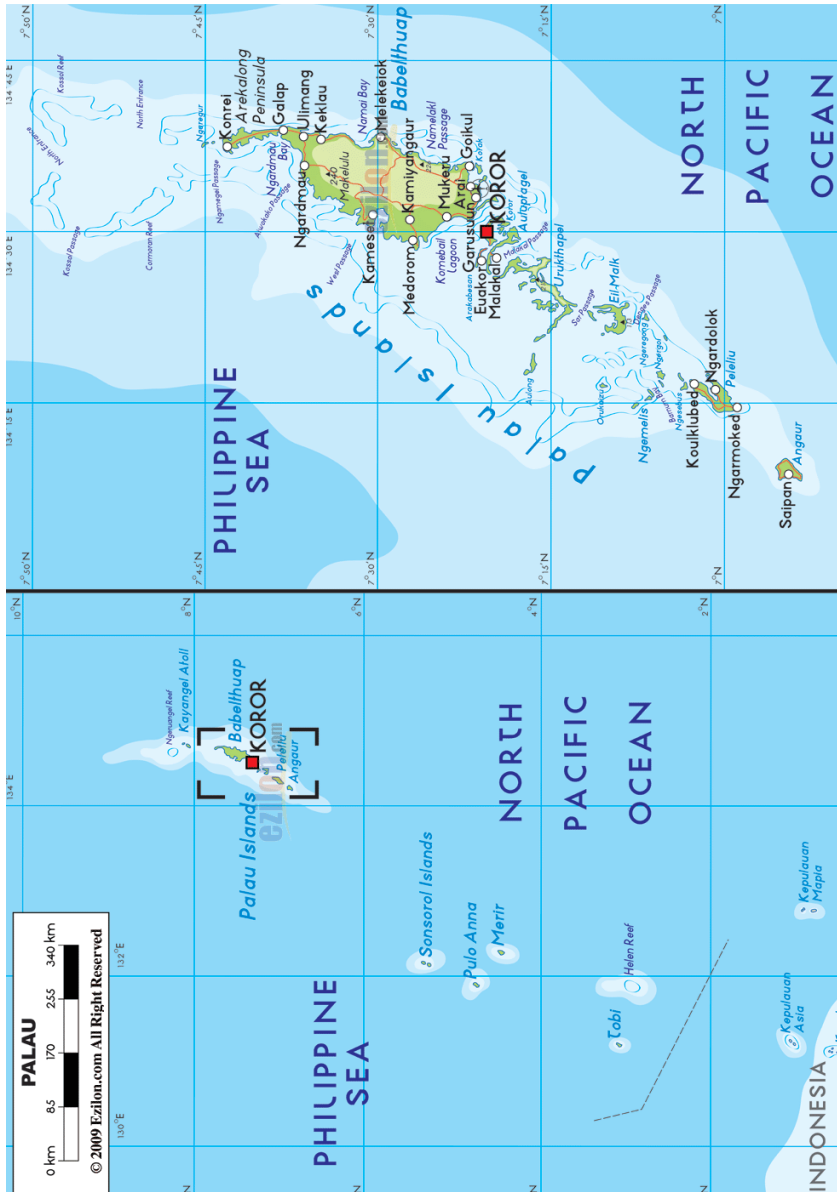
¹ See for example the Fifth Assessment Report of the IPCC (2014) for the scientific definition of the technical differences between ‘climate change’ and ‘global warming’.

Map of Oceania



Map 1: Pacific Islands, including Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ's). Image credit: CartoGIS Services, College of Asia and the Pacific, Australian National University. Available at: <http://asiapacific.anu.edu.au/mapsonline/base-maps/pacific-eez-zones>

Map of Palau



Map 2: Map of Republic of Palau. Image credit: Ezilon Maps. Available at: <https://www.ezilon.com/maps/oceania/palau-physical-maps.html>

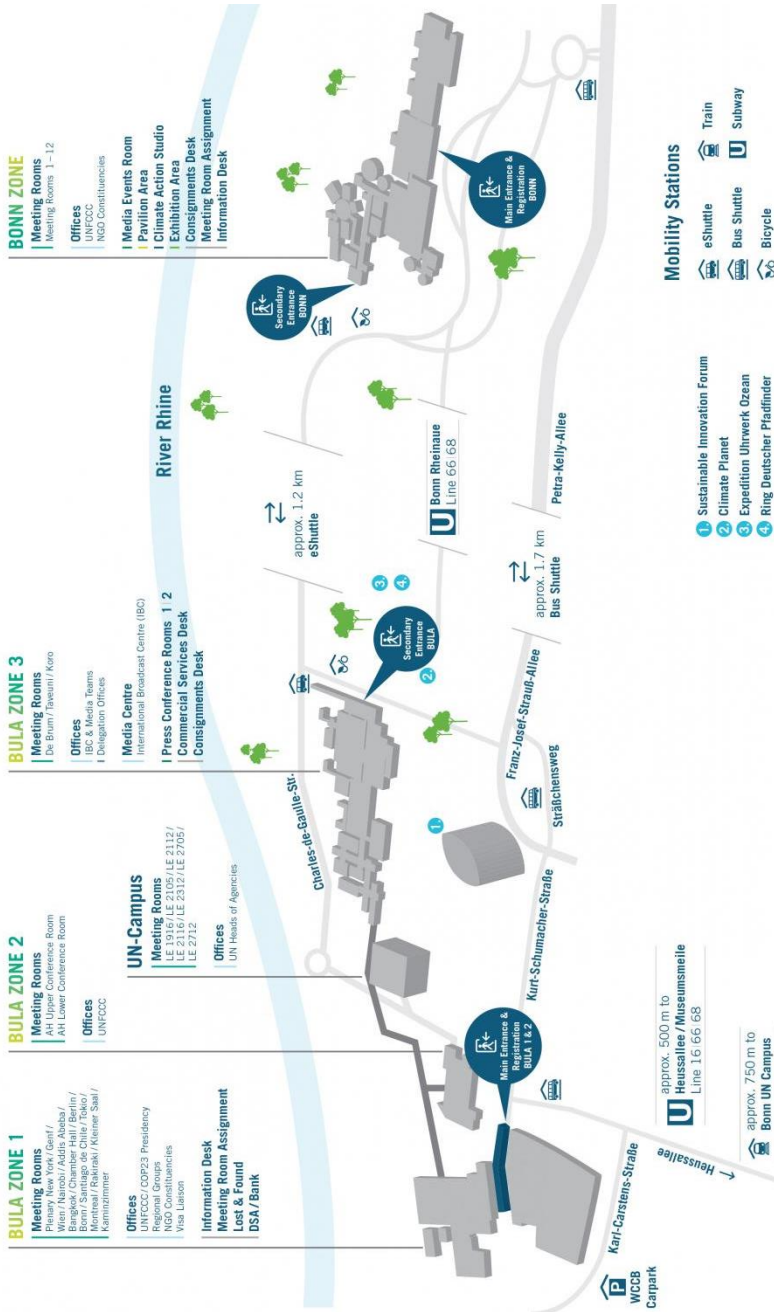
Map of COP21



Map 3: Overview map of the COP21 premises in Le Bourget, Paris, France. Image credit: UNFCCC, <https://unfccc.int/media/506616/cop21-overview-map.pdf>

Map of COP23

BONN ZONE



Map 4: Overview map of the COP23 premises in Bonn, Germany. Image credit: UNFCCC, <https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/2017-11/BulaZoneBonnZoneOverview.jpg>

Chapter 1

A Story for the Whole World: Facing Climate Change, and Telling it

As it happened: 195 countries agreed on a Paris climate deal.

I hope you keep it and show it to your children and grandchildren and tell them a new story about how you helped a little island and the whole world today.

This agreement is for those of us whose identity, whose culture, whose ancestors, whose whole being, is bound to their lands.

I have only spoken about myself and my islands but the same story will play out everywhere in the world. If this is a story about our islands, it is a story for the whole world.

Sometimes when you want to make a change, then it is necessary to turn the world upside down. Because it is not for the better, but it is simply for the best.

This Agreement should be the turning point in our story; a turning point for all of us.

- Selina Neirok Leem (18), Marshall Islands delegate at COP21
(Leem 2015)

On the stories of climate change and Oceania

The epigraph to this introduction illustrates some key aspects of this ethnographically grounded study on anthropogenic climate change and Pacific climate leadership: Challenges and opportunities of living with the consequences of a changing global climate. Selina, as quoted above, gave this speech to leaders from around the world on the evening when the Paris Agreement was adopted by the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Parties. She draws attention to the global role of “a little island”. The island countries of Oceania are often referred to as the frontline of climate change, and as the victims of an unjust situation where the countries that contribute the least to global greenhouse gas emissions suffer the greatest consequences. Reaching a consensus on a global agreement for reducing greenhouse gas emissions is, in Selina’s speech above, an opportunity for a “new story” that

provides a turning point away from dangerous human interference with the atmosphere. In order to reach this change however, it is necessary, as Selina puts it, to “turn the world upside down”: a subtle reference to changing the order of things, such as placing small before big, or perhaps even south before north.

‘The story’ then becomes a potent symbol of the relation between Pacific Island Countries and the world, a relation burdened by global climate change and a spectrum of local impacts that include environmental, social, cultural, political and economic dimensions. “Climate change is not ‘a problem’ waiting for ‘a solution,’” Mike Hulme (2009a:v) argues, “It is an environmental, cultural and political phenomenon which is reshaping the way we think about ourselves, our societies and humanity’s place on Earth”. Aligned with this, as Selina’s speech also shows, climate change may be an opportunity to reshape ways of thinking about the Pacific in the world. It is within this conceptual framework that I aim to explore the following key questions: In what ways is climate change as a multifaceted phenomenon present in Pacific people’s day-to-day lives and experiences? How is the relationship between Pacific Island countries and “the world”, as represented by United Nations and other transnational actors, influenced by issues concerning climate change? What are some of the ways through which Pacific people are sharing their experiences of climate change, and how may this provide an opportunity to gain insights into particular complexities of sociality and culture? And finally: What is the Pacific way of doing global climate change politics and diplomacy?

In order to explore this further, I approach climate change in line with Hulme (2009a; 2010a) as being simultaneously both physical manifestation and idea. The Pacific scholar and renowned social anthropologist Marilyn Strathern (1995) has put a similar thought forward in describing kinship as both concrete and abstract, as kin connect through the idea of having a relationship.² I suggest approaching climate change as a relation; in which capacity it is something that connects us and is created and re-created. As such, this study is not an analysis of environmental impacts on Pacific countries, per se. Rather, I seek to explore knowledges and linkages between

² In her pamphlet “The Relation”, Strathern (1995:7-8) asks: “What are we to do with the unspoken conjunction between the (abstract) conception of an idea and the (concrete) conception of a child?” *Conception* can, according to Strathern, refer to both a physical “generate, reproduce, create” as well as “the idea of connection”.

local understandings of climate change and international processes at different levels. Inspired by Strathern's (1995) understanding of the relation as knowledge, I see climate change as knowledge and as the production of knowledge. It is the anthropologist's job, Strathern ([1991] 2004) argues, to bring domains of knowledge together, although they may be dissimilar and different. This is where the strength lies of using the relation as a theoretical model of complex phenomena, because it has "the power to bring dissimilar orders or levels of knowledge together while conserving their difference" (Strathern, 1995:19).

One of the great challenges in approaching and understanding complexities of climate change is that these are understood and dealt with differently from one place to another. My point of departure and focus of analysis is therefore an argument that Pacific stories about climate change convey certain knowledge and insights to aspects of life that international climate change processes frequently separate out. This is particularly important in Oceania where there is a long tradition of telling and sharing stories (see for example Finnegan and Orbell 1995; Wickler 2002). In 1987 Richard Parmentier published a book about Palau where he explained how "*signs of history*" and "*signs in history*" may have a number of different stories attached to them (original emphasis, 1987:11). In a semantic perspective, signs are, according to Parmentier, both linguistic, such as a Palauan chant, and non-linguistic, such as a Palauan longhouse (1987:12). These signs have stories attached to them; this can be stories about ancient gods or family relations in the past, but at the same time, may also involve stories of normative valuation (Parmentier, 1987:107). The signs are interpreted and reinterpreted continuously, relating to Palauan history as well as socio-political domains, and recreated as current knowledge through the stories.

Even though I am here taking a less semantic approach and will be less concerned with signs, Parmentier's idea and analysis of Palau illustrates how stories as knowledge can provide insights to life and the value of them. Based on Pacific peoples' long traditions of using stories to transfer knowledge from one generation to the other, I wish to approach the empirically founded stories of climate change in a similar manner. For my interlocutors the term climate change encompasses a wide array of experiences and understandings, ranging from everyday struggles with flooding, to

writing a national climate change policy, or to negotiating with other countries at the United Nations. In order to analyse these disparate and multifaceted experiences I take a closer look at some of the historical and socio-political contexts that shape the way climate change is talked about and dealt with in the Pacific. A special ethnographic emphasis is placed on the Republic of Palau due to the country's self-declared status as somewhat of a 'world leader' on taking climate action. I also draw on materials from several other Pacific localities arguing that the insights gained from this approach simultaneously represent both knowledge and manifestations of climate change, as well as an opportunity to explore the relations in the global-local nexus of climate change through an ethnographic focus on decision-making processes and events. In this study then, I set out to describe how climate change unfolds in Oceania not only as environmental impact, but rather as part of political processes, documents and what I shall call *position-making*. The latter refers to the advances made by Pacific countries nationally, regionally, and globally, in order to politically position themselves within global climate change discourse and international climate change decision-making.

It has been argued that what we observe on the ground level are often manifestations of wider, global patterns and processes (Shore and Durão 2010). I suggest that through a focus on the approaches taken by many Pacific Islanders, such as storytelling and position-making, what is observed on the global level may also be greatly influenced by ongoing processes on the local level. I therefore argue that there is an ongoing process of mutual modification. In line with Anna Tsing (2005:1-5) I intend to explore some "global connections" -- inspired by her approach to "work[ing] through" them as they reveal "frictions" and "new arrangements of culture and power". The stories of climate change in this way become part of what Tsing calls scale-making projects as they "make us imagine locality" (2005:57). I am not of the understanding that 'the local' and 'the global' here are dichotomous by any means, yet applying the terminology allows a closer examination of differences between what to be considered more place-based versus more universalised.

Going further, I suggest that by making us imagine locality, the Pacific stories undergo a *conversion* of scales between local and global. The stories may take many different forms and have different content: They are shared by activists, youth groups,

politicians, elders, religious groups, and many more, and sharing is done through speeches, poetry, dances, and images, to name a few. I propose here the concept of *Pacific climate change stories*, which reflects the empirical cases presented and thus convey the local ethnographic realities of climate change. The concept is based on my interlocutors' own accounts as stories that arise from a perceived and experienced reality, repeatedly referred to by them as 'stories', as pertinently shown in Selina's speech as "a story about our islands". My approach to and analysis of stories is located in-between the areas of narrative and rhetorical frameworks (see for example Bruner 1991), as I approach stories here as an empirically-based model, drawing on Pacific notions of stories and storytelling. As this study will show, Pacific climate change stories are part of an attempt to create a relation between the Pacific Islands and global decision-making processes.

In what follows, this chapter is divided into four parts: *Facing climate change*, *Knowing climate change*, *Telling climate change*, and *Connecting climate change*. These four sections provide an introductory overview of the context concerning Pacific Islands and climate change and outline a range of challenges that have arisen as a result. Even though the challenges are many and complex, I also show some of the important ways Pacific Islanders are providing solutions and responses to the situation.

Facing climate change: Dimensions of disaster and discourse

Selina comes from the Marshall Islands, a country comprised of five isolated islands and twenty-nine atolls that is home to well over 70,000 people. The average elevation of these islands is 1.8 meters. Globally, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) predicts a 0.9 meter increase in global sea levels by 2100 (Gregory 2014). Since 1993, the global average of rising sea level is 3.1 mm per year (Lindsey 2018). For the Marshall Islands, however, sea levels have risen *double* the global average per year since 1993 at almost 7 mm meaning that by 2030 sea levels are expected to rise by a whole 9 cm. These rises represent one of the most pressing threats caused by climate change to islands and atolls, particularly for those located in the Western Pacific Ocean where rates up to four times the global average have been recorded (Nurse et al, 2014:1619). The Marshall Islands are in other words far from

alone in facing such a sombre situation and serve here as an example of a future outlook for the broader region. Rising sea levels cause both swell waves and storm surges including severe flooding and erosion risks that will degrade fresh groundwater resources across the Pacific Islands (Nurse et al, 2014:1616). In addition, an increase in surface temperature will increase the occurrence of coral bleaching and reef degradation. The impacts for island countries that are strongly dependent on their coral reef ecosystems are, as a result, devastating.

Large geographical and topographical variations across the Pacific region affect local impacts and severity. Ranging from highlands located several thousands of meters above sea level to low lying islands and atolls barely a meter above the surface, climate change impacts the lives of Pacific Islanders in quite uniquely localised ways (see Nurse et al 2014; Hviding and Borrevik 2019). Experiences of the most prominent threats to life in one place thereby goes from extremes such as frost in one village to extreme heat in another. These impacts are already at a point where people face grave challenges in dealing with them and has even forced some to leave their homes. Solemn examples include the nearly 3000 people on the Carteret Islands in Papua New Guinea that have been labelled as “the world’s first climate change refugees” (Beldi 2014; Connell 2016). This atoll has experienced a dramatic increase in the severity and frequency of king tides and sea level rise, which has led to contamination of fresh water and destroyed crops (Yamamoto and Esteban 2014; Connell and Lutkehaus 2017). The issue of relocation is becoming a reality and many inhabitants have already been resettled to Bougainville (Struck-Garbe 2018).

Furthermore, weather events related to the El Niño Southern Oscillation further increase the risks of serious droughts, floods, and damaging tropical storms (ADB 2013). The Asian Development Bank (ADB) (2013) states that frequencies of both El Niño and La Niña in the Pacific could be increased by more than forty percent in the coming century. In the Papua New Guinean highlands, the effects of El Niño have been experienced through severe cases of droughts and frost that impact local access to water and destroying crops, as extensively demonstrated by Jerry Jacka (2009; 2016) among the highland Porgerans.

The dramatic changes that Pacific Islanders are experiencing are well documented in a number of ways as climate change pushes weather events to strengths never before experienced. 2016 was the year of the most devastating cyclone that has ever swept across a country in the southern hemisphere when cyclone Winston destroyed large parts of Fiji.³ This happened only one year after several countries in the region experienced the category 5 strength cyclone Pam as it made its way southwards hitting Solomon Islands, Tuvalu and New Zealand on the way. The most devastating effects, however, were felt in Vanuatu as cyclone Pam travelled straight across the country leaving 75,000 people without their homes and over a dozen dead (Connors 2016). The damages caused by the power of cyclones take years to rebuild, but perhaps more importantly, take even longer to overcome mentally.

In the media, the Pacific Islands have been highly popular as almost apocalyptic examples of climate change. This concerns primarily narratives portraying Pacific Islanders as “sinking islands” (Connell 2018:73), “drowning”, a “Paradise lost” (Barnett and Campbell, 2010:168), or as “tragic victims” (Farbotko, 2005:289). These narratives have been popular in the media for their “cliché-ridden doomsday” effect (Kempf, 2009:200), but also carry a sense of belittlement of Pacific countries. The danger is that such portrayals of Pacific Islanders in public discourse reinforces stereotypes that delineates them as “weak, passive, unstable and marginal” (Barnett and Campbell, 2010:167).

The examples from different islands across the Pacific show that the threats posed by climate change are indeed very real with huge impacts across the region. This is despite the fact that the region’s greenhouse gas emissions “are *negligible* in relation to global emissions” (my emphasis, Nurse et al, 2014:1618), as the Pacific Islands in total contribute less than 0.03 percent (McCarthy et al, 2001:867). Patricia Townsend (2009:56) rightly therefore describes the situation as “one of the deepest global environmental injustices”. Similarly, David Lipset (2011:20) points to the great “inequality of it all” as Pacific island countries contribute the least to dangerous levels

³ I wish to note that tropical storms have different names depending on location: In the North Atlantic Ocean and Northeast Pacific, tropical storms are called hurricanes, in the Northwest Pacific Ocean they are called typhoons, and in the South Pacific and Indian Ocean it is referred to as cyclones. I have throughout the text referred to tropical storms as cyclones, except when quoting interlocutors who use the term typhoons.

of emissions yet experience the most immediate effects. Climate change therefore presents “unique dimensions” (Leduc, 2014:247) to a situation never seen before.

I suggest that some of these unique dimensions may come from factors such as how climate change has a simultaneous global and local presence, rapid and slow exposure, constant impendence, in addition to having highly unequal embodied experiences across the world. Furthermore, climate change can act as an intensifier of existing livelihood challenges that complicates a comprehensive understanding of the sheer dimension of consequences. In Pacific countries, there are a number of existing challenges connected to issues relating to historical backgrounds, colonial experiences, institutional arrangements, financial dependencies, political systems, and more that should also be taken into account of how climate change is faced (Levine, 2016:9).⁴ Moreover, the region covers nearly one third of the world’s surface area with 22 Pacific countries and territories spread across the Pacific Ocean, often divided into the three cultural categories or subregions of Micronesia, Melanesia, and Polynesia.⁵ It reflects a region which is distinctively complex and diverse, and where every state and territory is facing a number of different social, cultural, political and institutional challenges (see for example Qalo 2014). This certainly adds to the “unique dimensions” of climate change as recognised by Leduc (2014:247).

Yet, despite great diversity in the Pacific region, Stephen Levine (2016) still highlights important interconnectedness between Pacific Islands:

[S]ituated in one region – the Pacific Islands – reflect a diversity of experience just as great as, and perhaps greater than, any of the other regions on this planet. While interacting with each other [...] each island state and territory has its own distinctiveness, its own integrity. It is the complexity and diversity of the Pacific, *as well as its interconnectedness*, that makes an in-depth examination of each state and territory both meaningful and difficult (my emphasis, Levine, 2016:17).

Levine (2016:18) further argues, that even though there may be many different “Pacific ways”, there are certain fundamental problems that are shared across the Pacific.

⁴ I will elaborate further on these topics in Chapter 4 through in-depth examples from Palau, and by providing a more regional focus in Chapter 6.

⁵ The names for the subregions come from Greek and are descriptive of how the first Europeans saw the islands: Micronesia means small islands, Polynesia means many islands, and Melanesia means black islands. See Chapter 6 for a more background on how Pacific subregions are results of colonial categorising. See Appendix A for a complete overview of subregions and countries.

Climate change is a shared fundamental challenge for Pacific Islands, and I believe that the forms of interconnectedness in the region that emerge through facing climate change provides fruitful insights into the Pacific region's many challenges, but *also* the potentials. The past years have been very important for the Pacific Islands in determining how they as a region face climate change together. I argue that this is reflected in the development of new and/or strengthened regional formations, pushing for more pan-Pacific structures and priorities for the future of the region.

Knowing climate change: Knowledges of global and local kinds

One of the biggest challenges however, is that 'the international community' and other regions of the world, do not fully understand or have sufficient knowledge about the grave impacts of climate change affecting everyday life for the people of the Pacific. According to Barnett and Campbell (2010:81-82), much of the knowledge about climate change in the Pacific does not come from Pacific Islanders, but rather from "experts and their top-down generic models". The experts that Barnett and Campbell here refer to are often part of the *international climate regime*.

The climate regime historically took form in the 1970s and 1980s when international and intergovernmental institutions began focusing increasingly on issues of climate change. In 1988, UNEP and the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) created the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) "to provide the world with a clear scientific view on the current state of knowledge in climate change" (United Nations 2018). Their first report was, for many, a very clear message that something had to be done in regards to climate change. The report therefore led to the creation of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in 1992. The IPCC reports and policy outcomes have been criticised for lacking ethnographic research and in-depth knowledge of socio-economic dynamics in the affected locations (Boehmer-Christiansen 1994a; 1994b; Barnett 2001). Early IPCC reports (such as IPCC 2001; IPCC 2007) have also included little, if any, information on social and cultural dimensions. According to the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) (2009) the international approach to climate change strategies have previously been dominated

by a “one-size-fits-all” approach, with a clear need for a better-tailored local strategy that includes a broader framework of understanding climate change impacts.

One of the latest reports from IPCC, the Fifth Assessment Report (AR5), has however included a much greater emphasis on local environmental and indigenous knowledge compared to the previous reports (see IPCC 2014). The AR5 also makes several references to the complex situation in the Pacific, and to how existing challenges may be exacerbated due to climate change (Nurse et al 2014). Yet, even with these amendments, the latest IPCC reports have been criticised for overlooking historical and contextual information and therefore fails to provide the appropriate framing to grasp factors affecting sensitivity, adaptive capacity and vulnerability, as well as knowledge systems present in regions such as the Pacific (see Ford et al 2016). Jon Barnett and John Campbell expressed a similar critique nearly a decade ago by, in addition to pointing out that to the organisational form of the international climate regime may itself serve as a problem for island states and territories:

[T]he [UNFCCC], which is the major multilateral process intended to develop responses to climate change, and which is informed by the findings of the IPCC, has operated in a manner that makes it extremely difficult for small island countries to meaningfully participate. At one level, the intransigence of major greenhouse gas emitters has slowed the development of mitigation responses. At a deeper level, however, *the absence of specific information about the social and cultural consequences of climate change in islands, and the forms of adaptation that are necessary, means that there is insufficient recognition of the real magnitude of climate dangers in the Pacific and so less impetus for emissions reductions* (my emphasis, 2010:4).

The consequence of the international climate regime not understanding climate change in the Pacific Islands, would then be that solutions that treat island countries and territories in the singular (a “one-size-fits-all” approach) marginalises “the value of [...] local knowledge and approaches” (Barnett and Campbell, 2010:81).

Knowing climate change seems to be complicated by issues of scales and levels of global and local epistemological understandings. Peter Rudiak-Gould (2013b:120) has shown through his research in Marshall Islands how climate change is often portrayed as “global climate change”, even though the impacts are highly localised. However, Pacific people play a key role here too, a point clearly made by Susanne Becken (2005) who highlights the historically scarce contributions of information

provided *from* Pacific countries. She argues that one of the barriers to finding suitable strategies for climate change adaptation and mitigation in Fiji also has to do with Governments and others not having collected the required information and supplying necessary data (2005:389). Although Becken made her claim several years ago, there are still problematic issues concerning the flow of information coming out from Pacific countries, as will become clear in upcoming chapters.

Drawing on the above, I then suggest three aspects that affect how people may approach and understand climate change. The first is what Hulme (2010c:563) calls “global kinds of knowledge”:

Global kinds of knowledge yield global kinds of meaning-making and policy-making. They erase cultural differentiation and heterogeneity. They fail to do justice to the plurality of human living and may have considerably less purchase in problem-solving and policy-making than a multiplicity of local and diverse tools and indicators.

The problem of global kinds of knowledge such as climate models of global temperatures, is the ensuing limitations of “thinking in flattening ways” (Hulme, 2010c:563). Hulme (2010c:559) suggests that knowledge of global environmental change has been subject to a downplaying of cultural differences and ignoring spatial relationships of power which lead to “scales collaps[ing] to the global”. The focus, he argues, should instead be on understanding how knowledge itself can change, alongside its institutional practices and culture. I claim that this touches upon why Pacific climate change stories are so important, as they provide a much more nuanced understanding of climate change compared to the more prevalent climate models. Stories about Pacific people’s climate change experiences provide examples of cultural differentiation and brings more context to “flattened” thinking.

The challenge of knowing climate change thus becomes one of scale, as argued by Jessica Barnes et al (2013:543):

At larger spatial and temporal scales, the ‘fingerprint’ of anthropogenic climate change is easy to identify, and predictions of global temperature increase can be made with a fair level of certainty. But at the smaller scales at which everyday lives are affected and policy is implemented, it is far more difficult to attribute events and trends to climate change and project changes and their impacts.

In that sense, it may be more convenient or perhaps easier to relate to the scientific models of climate change because they provide a generalised overview of the situation,

while, as in the case of Pacific Islands, the local dimensions of climate change are complex, all encompassing, and entangled in existing challenges.

Organised forms of sharing knowledge about climate change across geographical regions and actors does however exist. I am thinking here in particular about climate change projects and programmes that seek to “spread awareness”, “reduce vulnerability”, or “build capacity”. Many of them aim to assist Pacific islanders through initiatives that teach them about climate change or help them adapting to effects. In recent decades, there has been a considerable increase in the number of projects that have been introduced and implemented in Pacific societies (see Barnett and Campbell 2010; Newell 2018). Many of these initiatives receive their funding and objectives from overseas donors and agencies, although it should also be noted that there is an increasing number of local non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and Pacific governments as well.

Yet, my main interest here is how knowledge concerning impacts of climate change in the Pacific can inform others to provide a more nuanced understanding of climate change. Put differently, what information comes out of the Pacific region and how does it reach others? This leads to a second aspect of knowing climate change that I wish to highlight. In most of the climate change projects, extensive documentation of progress in the form of outputs or reports is a requirement. Many of the projects are based on the content of international conventions that are part of the international climate regime. The funding for projects often comes from multilateral or intergovernmental donors that also decide criteria related to the sharing and gathering of information.

The way the international climate regime is set up provides little room for localised forms of understanding and more specific examples. Historically, the international climate regime has preferred standardised procedures in the form of universalised and ‘top-down’ approaches that may ‘silence’ other voices (Smith 2007). This is further reflected through stylistic preferences and systemic forms of knowledge in the outputs and reports resulting from the projects as well. The result is that Pacific people’s experiences are *not* known due to the standards, forms and language used being “knowledge practices already familiar” (Riles, 2001:5) to donors. There is, as I

will demonstrate in Chapter 5, an ongoing transformation of Pacific experiences of climate change to comply with certain forms of language style and form of output.⁶ A similar process of transformation is also present even when producing national policies, as I will show through following the creation of the Palau Climate Change Policy. The reason for why such a transformation of information occurs, I argue, is that it has to comply with standards compatible to international climate frameworks.

The overarching institutional framework and its categorisation of countries are as such quite influential. Countries that are members to the UN are referred to as *Parties*. The UNFCCC now has 197 member countries that are considered Parties to the Convention, and that are broadly divided into industrialised countries (Annex I and Annex II countries) and developing countries (non-annex II countries). UNFCCC divides countries into three groups depending on their degree of commitments: Annex I Parties include industrialised countries which in 1992 were members of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), and countries with status as economies in transition (EIT). Annex II Parties are OECD members of Annex I, but not countries that are EIT. That means they are required to provide financial resources for developing countries. Non-Annex I Parties are developing countries of which some are recognised as especially vulnerable to impacts of climate change – a category under which all Pacific countries fall.⁷ Kiribati, Solomon Islands, Tuvalu and Vanuatu are further classified as least developed countries (LDCs).⁸ These are global categorisations that the UNFCCC applies.

Hulme (2010c:563) has argued that institutional frameworks also provide the foundation for the ordering of knowledge: “Processes of knowledge-making are intimately bound up with the assumptions about political and social ordering which lie

⁶ For clarification, I wish to point out that I view transformation as different from conversion. Whereas I see transformation here as a process that may transform language and form, I use conversion to describe how knowledge may transcend scales and levels.

⁷ A complete overview is available at the UNFCCC website: <https://unfccc.int/parties-observers>.

⁸ There are currently 47 low-income countries that are classified as least developed countries (LDCs) and that are therefore given special consideration because of a limited capacity to respond and adapt to climate change. This categorisation is also important for accessing and getting funding. Lately, there has been an increase in the number of countries graduating from the LDC category. In regards to Pacific countries, Samoa graduated in 2014. Vanuatu is scheduled to graduate in 2020, and Solomon Islands has been recommended to “graduate” and leave the group after a review of all countries in March 2018. There have been debates around the graduation process however, concerning what exactly it involves for funding opportunities after the countries leave status as LDC. In Samoa, discussions highlighted that the decision to graduate from LDC status was decided by the UN, and were not in collaboration with Samoans. This received some critique, as the government still experienced economic difficulties after a natural disaster and had debts to other countries and funding institutions.

implicit in the institutions which enable and endorse this knowledge”. The international climate regime and the standard-setting conventions influence forms and flows of knowledge, as well as the way it is shared and enabled through outputs and reports. Similar processes have been brought to light by James C. Scott (1998:4) who exposes how states simplify the local realities of people, tied to a high-modernist ideology where scientific and technical progress is valued by which he terms “*techne*”. The opposite of a valued standardised form is for Scott (1998:313) “*metis*”, which is “practical skill and acquired intelligence in responding to a constantly changing natural human environment”. A similar idea may be put forward regarding the Pacific climate change stories that rely on acquired experience of climate change. In contrast to Scott’s case where ‘the state’ (of which he does not give a clear definition) may attempt to silence such experience, I argue however that Pacific state representatives actively use and draw on this practical experience and knowledge in national and international settings. This is, as will become increasingly clear throughout this text, due to a ‘density’ or ‘closeness’ between people, state and land in many Pacific countries.

That leads me to the third aspect of knowing climate change, which relates to ways of experiencing it. Peter Rudiak-Gould (2013b:120) asks: “Can the phenomenon called “global climate change” be witnessed firsthand with the naked senses?” He thereby draws attention to the empirical question of climate change, between those who have ‘seen’ it and those who have not, or the “*visibilist*” and “*invisibilist*” (2013:120). For many Pacific people (but not all), there is a strong belief that climate change is real “because I have seen it” through its on-the-ground manifestations such as cyclones, flooding, or droughts. Pacific Islanders have empirical knowledge of climate change through seeing and experiencing which gives ground for Pacific climate change stories. The importance of knowledge lies in what is considered as *useful* in a given context, as suggested by Dan Sarewitz in Hulme: “... knowledge that is useful - and used - is knowledge that emerges within a particular social and institutional context” (in Hulme, 2010c:563).

I consequently ask: What are the social and institutional contexts in which ‘useful knowledge’ from Pacific people emerges? Why and how does it do so? In providing answers to these questions in the following sections, I show that Pacific

Islanders are finding and creating space in the international forum to speak over global kinds and institutionalised forms of knowledge by means of their empirical knowledge. They do so through the telling and sharing of Pacific climate change stories and the usefulness of this approach is derived, amongst other things, from its non-formal and cultural form.

Telling climate change: Pacific voices and vulnerabilities

For Pacific people, getting their voices to be heard is almost impossible. With globalization and urban based education, it is almost impossible to get genuine information about local solutions. Like stories about fishing, all the stories that we get are from the industrial fishermen not the artisanal and skilful local fishers who catch garfish using kites they fly from their dugout canoe or use noose a to catch the likes of sharks and tuna. The fact that these stories are not told does not mean that they do not exist: it [is] just that people do not talk about them. It is not clear if the Pacific people are treated like their fish when it comes to globalization and climate change... they are caught to be consumed in bulk in regional and global conferences or thrown back to the sea, ignored; because they do not meet private agendas. Our stories are always from the fishermen and women who consume them, never from the fish. (Qalo, Veitayaki and Tipu, 2014:2010)

The frustration expressed in this quote by Pacific scholars Ropate Qalo, Joeli Veitayaki and Feue Tipu sharply illustrates how Pacific people are not feeling heard. Nor are the suggested solutions considerate of Pacific contexts and dimensions. Through an emblematic comparison with the practice of fishing, Qalo, Veitayaki, and Tipu state that “the stories that we get”, referring to flows of knowledge, have been rather one-way. Little value has been placed on knowledges of Pacific Islanders, but as they point out, “[t]he fact that these stories are not told does not mean that they do not exist”. The problem at hand for Pacific people is then related to *not* being able to tell others about their experiences and insights of climate change. Much of this is tied up in the ways ambitions for knowledge-sharing is set up formally through projects and programmes, as well as several reporting mechanisms established under the auspice of the international climate regime. The system-oriented process for sharing is complicated, and the requirements for information and stylistic forms transform Pacific experiences into matrixes, numbers, and graphs. Yet, these so-called knowledge-sharing practices are what dominate and constitute much of the trans-regional and international exchanges.

A similar challenge is found in the way climate change is dealt with internationally through the negotiations at COPs. The COPs are key to the organisation of how the world deals with climate change. The meetings have very particular “standardised social forms” (Brown, Reed and Yarrow, 2017:11) that follow UN protocols. My own ethnographic experiences through participating in these negotiations is that the emphasis on bureaucratic structure and technocratic approaches that value reporting systems and meetings is at times difficult for Pacific countries. The situation again arises whereby Pacific delegates *cannot* tell other decision-makers directly about their climate change experiences, nor the wider social and cultural impacts. This is due to a large extent to how the negotiations are set up through UN protocol that ascribe very particular forms of interaction between delegates. Some of the problems for Pacific delegations include being heard during negotiations, as well as adopting and speaking the language of negotiation that follows a particular form of protocol and technical considerations.

COP negotiations are extremely system heavy and time consuming. Just the sheer size of these conferences that attract thousands of delegates from across the world is a challenge due to the limited amount of people from Pacific countries who have the sufficient skills and understanding of the technical language. Because of the limited amount of people available to follow up on the reporting demands of international climate organisations, the Pacific people who work within this field are overworked and spend a considerable amount of time traveling to attend meetings around the world. In climate negotiations there is furthermore limited room for Pacific delegates to convey their positions and aims as stances have to be agreed on in country blocks, such as AOSIS and G77+China. And although many Pacific countries now have an increasing number of highly skilled and talented negotiators, it takes time to acquire and master the necessary negotiation skill-sets. In other larger countries, where resources are more readily available, negotiators have received more training than in most Pacific countries and are higher in number. Enhancing negotiation skills and understanding for Pacific islanders attending the meetings has therefore been an important goal in several Pacific-led pre-COP training events that have been organised

by both the University of South Pacific (USP) and the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP).

In their attempts to create global mechanisms, institutions and documents, climate conferences can similarly be said to create ‘global kinds of knowledge’ that are deprived of cultural significance (Hulme 2010c). Climate change experiences and cultural differences are not expressed in international documents such as the Paris Agreement. That is also why, as expressed to me by some Pacific delegates, it is hard to relate what is going on at the conference to what is going on ‘back home’ in the Pacific Islands. The Pacific experiences of climate change that provide the background for taking particular positions in order to achieve particular goals at such negotiations, are transformed to a language that has been ‘flattened’ through global negotiations word by word. The whole ordeal is however highly political, with all countries wanting their issues fronted through the use of very particular words and not others, and leaving little room for sociocultural issues. Barnett and Campbell (2010:4) argue that omitting this kind of information has a consequence on the type of authority Pacific countries have within climate politics:

Of course, a lack of information about climate change as a social and cultural problem in the South Pacific is only one of many reasons for the tardiness of the international community to reduce emissions and to help the Pacific Islands to adapt. However, it is an important one given that a large component of the little power these countries have in climate politics comes from the moral pressure they are able to exert.

I agree in part with Barnett and Campbell’s argument here in that the lack of insights into climate change as a social and cultural problem from others poses a serious issue. And power may indeed come from moral pressure. However, as this study will show, Pacific power does not come from moral pressure alone.

The information provided through the stories that Pacific people share with the rest of the world is not to be seen solely as a moral impetus, but it should also be taken seriously as climate change knowledge in itself. Certainly, one can speculate that the reason for the ‘vulnerable countries’ of the Pacific being provided any speaking time in the first place is rooted in a sort of guilty conscience among developed countries for their unsustainable emissions. Furthermore, one could also draw in arguments of ‘otherness’ (Said, 1978:97) where Pacific Islanders are exoticized and put into pre-

existing categories of ‘vulnerable victims’ that diminished their agency. I find however, that explaining it simply through guilty conscience and moral pressure ignores Pacific authority and does not take seriously Pacific agency. What has become increasingly clear during recent UN climate conferences, is that when many of the Pacific representatives speak to ‘the international community’, they purposely apply their knowledge based on Pacific Islanders’ climate change experience and understanding into international negotiations in order to establish their position.

“We are not drowning, we are fighting!”

This powerful statement has become a popular mantra and message for the 350.org initiated Pacific Climate Warriors. The Climate Warriors are climate activists who want to “change the global narrative of the Pacific Islands - from drowning and victimisation, to building the power to fight” (Packard 2013). A similar desire to change a narrative of powerlessness is found among UN Pacific representatives and other island states that are categorised by the UN as Small Island Developing States (SIDS). Instead of being characterised by constraints such as smallness in terms of landmass, Pacific representatives are actively trying to change it to a term more appreciative of strengths and opportunities. Instead, Pacific countries are “Large Ocean States” with “Huge Ocean Solutions” (Uludong 2017), or alternatively, “Big Ocean Powers” (Woody 2017) or “Big Ocean States”. Pacific people are hereby attempting to change the way others may perceive and speak about the Pacific Islands, as well as gaining an authority that allows them to speak out and be heard.

Such desires are particularly apparent in the aim of Pacific countries to be self-declared ‘Climate Leaders’. This aim has become increasingly clear through acts of position-making in recent years that exemplifies for other countries what such a leadership would entail. For that reason, Palau here serves as an excellent case, and in Chapter 4, I follow the creation of the Palauan National Marine Sanctuary Act as an example of both national decision-making and global position-making. Palauan President, Tommy Remenegesau Jr., made explicitly clear that the Marine Sanctuary was “Our Turn to Lead. Lead by Example”. Similar large-scale national conservation efforts have been initiated across the Pacific region, for example in Cook Islands and Kiribati. Using their Pacific countries as ‘measurement’ for others, it has been argued

that “islands are laboratories for sustainable solutions for the rest of the world” (Boersma 2018). In this perspective, Pacific leaders set examples for other nations in what can be called a sort of ‘sustainable solutions leadership’. This kind of leadership is also found on a regional level through numerous regional declarations, of which the Majuro Declaration for Climate Leadership (2013) explicitly stated that the Pacific signatories “commit to be Climate Leaders.”

There seems to be a latent paradox here, in that the countries that are the most vulnerable and have a limited amount of resources are the ones taking the biggest risks in terms of national decisions and solutions that may affect the country’s economic status and sources of income. I suggest that this relates to another kind of measurement, one that is connected to what was explained to me by an interlocutor as “having a lot of climate change”. Upon arrival in Palau, I was questioned about my choice of high islands as locations for my fieldwork. Why did I want to study climate change on high islands like Fiji, Solomon Islands, and Palau? If I really wanted to do research on climate change, I was told that I “should go to Kiribati and Tuvalu and those places. They have a lot of climate change”. This idea of ‘having climate change’ is an interesting thought that opens up for a few interpretations that I wish to reflect around as I believe it can provide answers to the leadership role of Pacific countries. First, ‘having climate change’ suggests that there is more climate change in one place than in other. For my interlocutor, this seems to be the case among the Pacific Islands, which is not surprising seeing how atoll countries like Kiribati and Tuvalu are frequently described as the most vulnerable to climate change impacts.

Second, instead of giving attention to the level of impact caused by climate change through categorising a country as more or less ‘vulnerable’, the thought of ‘having’ climate change is redirecting attention to the state of it, or even, the ownership thereof. For this reason, it may provide an understanding of the inverted proportional international presence by Pacific Islands on a global stage. In that sense, it gives a more pro-active description in that it does not only focus on the impacts or degree of vulnerability, but it instead highlights the presence of climate change. In lack of finding a suitable existing terminology to describe this, I have found it necessary here to develop my own term that I have called ‘*climate change-ness*’. I wish to draw attention

to the experience of living *with* climate change, embedded in my interlocutor's statement of countries having more or less of climate change. There are many ways to view climate change and its many different uses in popular discourse reflect this (see Hulme 2009a). This is connected not only to the physical impacts of climate change, but how "the idea of climate change is altering our social worlds" as well (Hulme, 2009a:xxviii). Building on this, I use the term climate change-ness in this study to explore ideas about the way climate change may contribute to altering Pacific countries' perception of their place or role in the world, as those who 'have a lot of climate change'.

In that sense, the level of climate change-ness is part of what provides a sort of authority and even agency, for Pacific countries and their international representatives at negotiations and elsewhere, to speak on behalf of living closely with manifestations of climate change. Furthermore, I suggest that Pacific people are well equipped to make use of such a position for their advantage because of certain Pacific forms of sociality and culture, as explored in Chapter 4. This becomes clear, as Chapter 7 shows in greater detail, through the ways in which Pacific states' delegations and delegates have been able to take on noteworthy international leadership roles at the UN and at the climate negotiations. Examples include establishing the High Ambition Coalition at COP21 by then Marshall Islands' Minister for Foreign Affairs, Tony deBrum, as well as Fiji's major role serving as the Presidency for COP23. Pacific delegations are now taking a far more active role in shaping and influencing the form and style of interaction through a 'culturalisation' of the "global form" (Riles, 2017:183) of UN meetings. Pacific delegates are finding their own way of telling others about their experience of climate change and how to prevent dangerous consequences. But in order for it to be successful, I further claim, it is necessary to establish a relation of understanding.

Connecting climate change: Creating relations of understanding

The overall situation may at this point be summarised as one where "global kinds of knowledge" dominate, bureaucratic practices are preferred, and local dimensions are not understood. The consequence of this is that many Pacific people experience that the levels on which these dynamics play out, do not connect. Even among Pacific

Islanders who work across levels in their professions, there is a sense of disconnect when relating it to the experience of climate change. “Even though it is a universal agreement,” one Palauan interlocutor bemoaned to me while discussing his work with the UNFCCC, “we are using our own experience on the ground. Unfortunately, that doesn’t translate into anything in this convention”. He expressed a sense of disconnect between what goes on in international discussions and “on the ground” in the islands. Other Pacific delegates I talked to at the climate negotiations in Paris, Marrakech and Bonn struggled with how they could “bring something back home”, as it was unclear at times what the outcomes of negotiations were, and what meaning any outcomes carried for people living their day-to-day life in the Pacific.

Additionally, the system that comprises the international climate regime has often been found confusing. “There are so many focal points that the focal points need focal points!” Minister Tony deBrum complained in his keynote at the Waves of Change conference that I attended in Honolulu in 2013. Focal points are designated contacts for coordination between national initiatives and governments on one hand, and the UN agencies or other international actors on the other. Although the purpose of focal points is to secure a productive connection between these actors, it seems that the systemic processes and objectives are at times confusing rather than helpful. This is further complicated by the overuse of the same people serving as focal points (or in similar roles) in the Pacific region, who then end up having a multitude of roles and positions simultaneously. The situation is disconcerting and “convoluted”, as further described by Minister deBrum at the same conference: “So confused and convoluted is the field out there that it is argued one needs extensive training and experience to be able to understand it in its bundled form”. So how do Pacific Islanders untangle the ‘climate change bundle’ and make the necessary connections between levels, scales and knowledges?

Many of the challenges that are related to or amplified by climate change pertain to notions of *understanding* and *resolving*. These stand out as two precarious and entangled dimensions of climate change. Challenges and disagreements arise when there is a perceived lack of understanding and solutions (Hulme 2009a; 2009b). When people have different perceptions or expectations, “frictions” (Tsing 2005) or “clashes”

(Eriksen 2016) may occur, which hinders constructive development for increased understanding and problem solving. As a response, many Pacific Islanders are therefore voicing a desire for more Pacific-led approaches that take into account how they face and know climate change as shown.

David Murray (in Qalo, Veitayaki and Tipu, 2014:210) suggests an approach that includes scaling up: “Instead of scaling down from big to small there is the chance to inquire into the inventiveness in the smaller of the microstates and territories and maybe scale up from there”. A similar idea of shifting scales, or perhaps ‘rescaling’, is expressed in Selina’s speech at the beginning of the chapter. “Sometimes when you want to make a change,” Selina argues, “then it is necessary to turn the world upside down. Because it is not for the better, but it is simply for the best”. The notion of doing what is ‘best’ for the world reveals, I suggest, a moral imperative, but it also reflects a desire to lead in doing what is considered to be best. In order to be successful however, the climate leadership that Pacific countries are aiming for is depending on having an understanding of Pacific climate change issues by non-Pacific actors.

A relation of understanding must be established where Pacific experiences of facing and knowing climate change can be told and shared. This is where the field of diplomacy stands out as a fruitful area of focus, as it is the primary way international relations are maintained and developed. Jorge Heine (2013) in *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Diplomacy* defines diplomacy as “an activity that acts as a ‘hinge’ between ‘home’ and ‘abroad’”. The recent development of a more defined Pacific Climate Diplomacy (see Goulding 2015; Carter 2015) therefore serves as an extraordinary field to explore how Pacific Islanders are working to establish a greater cross-regional connection, and is hence the focus for Chapter 6. According to Minister deBrum (2014), creating this link between home and abroad is particularly prevailing for a diplomacy that focuses on climate change:

Climate diplomacy begins at home, but it requires creative thinking, constant lobbying, and technical substance. Diplomacy has its origins in helping countries avoid the scourge of war and create a better tomorrow. This could not be more true for the challenge of our generation – climate change.

Pushing forward a similar argument at a side event I attended on issues of climate diplomacy during the thirds UN SIDS Conference in Samoa in 2014, Prime Minister

of Tuvalu Enele Sosene Sopoaga (2014) underlined the importance of a climate diplomacy that involves local levels of government because “they are the owners of the land and the real people to deal with”. Sopoaga further underlined that the way to secure the involvement of “the owners of the land” is through greater contextualisation of climate change. By that, he highlights a similar point made by then President of Kiribati Anote Tong (2015) at a side event I attended at COP21 in Paris in 2015, who called out the need “to represent what climate change means for us in that part of the world”.

Many of the Pacific countries and territories share similar environmental impacts and projected scientific outlooks. Recent decades have therefore seen the growth of a more regional unified voice from Pacific countries on climate change. As a consequence, climate change has brought to light issues of differences with neighbouring countries, particularly Australia, but also New Zealand, USA and China. One important difference in recent years has been the contentious issue of including 1.5 or 2 degrees Celsius as goal of maximum temperature rise in the Paris Agreement. The projected consequences in a 1.5-degree rise versus a 2-degree rise has massive significance for island nations (IPCC 2018). Pacific countries have therefore strongly advocated for including 1.5 degrees in the Paris Agreement with the slogan “1.5 to stay alive”. Other Pacific Rim countries, Australia in particular, have historically not supported this goal. This disagreement reflects a limited understanding of the climate change impacts in Pacific island countries and their realities under a 2 degrees temperature rise. However, in the adopted version of the 2015 Paris Agreement, the limit on temperature increase is “well below 2 degrees C above pre-industrial levels and pursuing efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5 degrees C above pre-industrial levels” (United Nations 2015). As Chapter 6 and 7 will show, the efforts by Pacific delegations ahead of and during COP21 played a key role in achieving this and reflects the growing regional Pacific voice.

Many of the Pacific countries have expressed a desire to remove themselves from former foreign dependencies and to establish new regional architectures (MacLellan 2015). Climate change issues have made this increasingly clear and effectuated efforts that support a greater Pacific independence and voice. In 2013, the region was described as being at “the crossroads” by Papua New Guinea Prime

Minister Mekere Morauta (Maclellan, 2015:2). It symbolises a clear turn towards a more “island centred regionalism” (Maclellan, 2015:4), particularly visible through the growth of regional organisations that do not include the membership of any Rim countries. Examples of this is the establishment of Pacific Islands Development Forum, as well as strengthening the role of the Pacific SIDS (PSIDS) group in the UN (Fry and Tarte 2015). The UN is an important arena where Pacific representatives can voice their concerns and be heard, as it allows Pacific states to engage with other member states as equal parties. Pacific member states, together with other island states, are in many ways united by the threat that climate change poses to their survival and frequently adopt a common stance in negotiations. They were, as an example, the first to propose a draft text during the Kyoto Protocol negotiations calling for cuts in carbon dioxide emissions of 20 percent from 1990 levels by 2005. Such actions show how small countries can have a big voice provided they are granted equal opportunities to speak.

In what has become an iconic text for the Pacific region, Tongan anthropologist Eveli Hau’ofa in *Our Sea Of Islands* (1994:152) addressed such notions of size and scale:

the idea of smallness is relative; it depends on what is included and excluded in any calculation of size. [...] [I]f we look at the myths, legends, and oral traditions, and the cosmologies of the peoples of Oceania, it becomes evident that they did not conceive of their world in such microscopic proportions. [...] Their world was anything but tiny. They thought big and recounted their deeds in epic proportions.

Smallness is a state of mind, argues Hau’ofa. This certainly rings true considering how Pacific Islands ‘think big’ through taking on a global Climate Leadership role. However, even though Hau’ofa’s (1994:148) vision for Oceania is important for ideological purposes, he applies a somewhat outdated division of what he further calls “levels of operation” between “national governments and regional and international diplomacy” versus “the grass roots”. Since the beginning of the 1990s, much has changed in the Pacific region.

New countries have gained independence, this includes Palau in 1994, and new forms of communication makes information increasingly accessible within the Pacific and beyond. An ever-increasing number of Pacific people are now highly active on

social media, where they can express their opinions and read about events taking place far away. These opportunities also influence interactions between Pacific diplomats (a broad categorisation in which I include Ambassadors, negotiators, Heads of States, ministers and others who officially represent their Pacific countries abroad) and “grass roots”, as well as how they share information. Stories about an eroding beach or a flooded living room can reach thousands of readers as it happens. This means that stories from “isolated dots” (Hau’ofa, 1994:153) can reach decision-makers in seconds. Similarly, decision-makers and diplomats actively use social media to express their own opinions and experiences. In fact, the last decade has seen the rise of new forms of diplomacy, in particular digital diplomacy or eDiplomacy, such as “twiplomacy” (see Copeland 2013). The latter refers to the use of the social media platform Twitter for diplomatic purposes. Many Pacific leaders, as Chapter 6 will show, are making use of such digital platforms to contextualise climate change and to create a relation of understanding between ‘home’ and ‘abroad’.

I include this kind of sharing of climate change information from the Pacific as part of Pacific climate change stories. I view it as being what Hulme (2010c:563) describes as ‘useful knowledge’, in that Pacific climate change stories – even online - invokes a conceptualisation and contextualisation of how climate change looks and feels like. The stories also provide insights about *who* is affected by climate change, and in that sense “giv[ing] climate change a human face” (Hereniko, 2014:226). This kind of conceptualisation and contextualization of climate change is similarly being incorporated by Pacific delegates into UN climate negotiations and conferences. In UN climate negotiations, particularities of place and people have historically been left out by virtue of following the rules of protocol that set the tone of language between negotiators and shapes the social forms of meetings (Brown, Reed and Yarrow 2017).

Yet, the response coming from the Pacific countries in recent years is instead taking approaches that are considered particularly ‘Pacific’ in many ways. I suggest that this comes as a response to the formal protocols of interaction during negotiations that attempt to make these meetings culturally ‘neutral’ (Galtung 1983) or ‘technical’ (Mosse 2014) in order to speak what I call a *‘language in-between’* cultures. Simultaneously as they are taking on a more defined ‘climate leadership role’ globally,

Pacific Islanders are fronting particular forms of Pacific culture and sociality at the UN climate conferences. I call this a Pacific ‘culturalisation’ of negotiations, but it does not mean that I put forward a culturalist argument.

Although it directs attention to cultural specificity, it is not as a static counterpart to other forms of knowledge. Instead, I view a ‘culturalisation’ of negotiations as part of a dynamic process that is continuously shaped by Pacific representatives as they develop forms of climate diplomacy. “The knowledge that makes a difference in changing the world”, Tsing (2005:8) has argued, “is knowledge that travels and mobilizes, shifting and creating new forces and agents of history in its paths”. Inspired by this, I argue that as Pacific climate change stories travel and mobilise, they create new connections of meaning and understanding along the way that deals with both the challenges and possibilities of facing, knowing, telling, and connecting climate change.

Chapter 2

Reflections on Methodology and Answering Calls for Climate Change Ethnography

Introduction

The last decade has seen an increase in calls made by anthropologists to reassess anthropological approaches as a response to climate change. There is a strong consensus among anthropologists writing about the role of anthropology in climate change research, that the discipline can offer highly valuable insights (see Barnes and Dove 2015; Barnes et al 2013; Baer and Singer 2014). Much of this has to do with the fieldwork methodology, which makes it possible for anthropologists to provide in-depth empirical research. There is a need for anthropological contributions outside of the discipline as well (Barnes et al 2013; Crate and Nuttall 2016), and calls have been made for skilled ethnographers who can provide empirical research within various areas such as diplomacy, climate science, policy-making and conflict (Hulme and Mahony 2013; Carter 2015; World Economic Forum 2018). I share the view that there is a need for anthropological contributions, and I firmly believe that empirical insights into the diverse complexities of climate change are highly important.

In light of this, the present chapter serves a dual purpose. First, it provides background to the methods and methodology of my fieldwork in particular. I argue that because of the fieldwork's composition, consisting of a multitude of localities and temporalities across levels and scales, this study is a multi-level, multi-scalar and multi-sited ethnography. Second, the chapter turns the attention towards the anthropology of climate change in an attempt to examine some of the calls that have been made, as well as to suggest further elaborations to the area. I do so on the basis of my own research, juxtaposing it with current suggestions that include "climate change ethnography" (Crate, 2011) and a "new ethnography, powerful enough to depict global processes and entwinements" (Kempf, 2012:234). Through a perusal of anthropological contributions and methodological suggestions, I underline the need for an approach that can serve as

a foundation for both analytical advances as well as theoretical frameworks. I do so by drawing on the methods used in my own fieldwork, as these helped bring to light some of the core challenges for Pacific people relating to climate change, namely understanding contextual perplexities across levels and scales. Through applying a method that allowed my fieldwork to expand over time, by actively following interlocutors and discourses, I gained insight on how climate change knowledges travel, are transformed, and are created.

From Palau to Paris: Developing a Modus Operandi

Research affiliations and collaborations

This PhD project was initially placed under the European Union (EU) funded project “ECOPAS – Climate Change Uncertainties and Policy Making for the Pacific Front”. The ECOPAS project set out to be comparative and multi-disciplinary in its execution, with a strong focus on establishing networks of collaboration between Europe and the Pacific region. Many of these collaborations have enabled possibilities and learning opportunities that have been valuable for this PhD research. The ECOPAS network allowed for knowledge-sharing in several European and Pacific settings with a broad representation of actors, ranging from academics, decision-makers, students, bureaucrats, ‘grassroots’, and so many more. The ECOPAS Coordination Team was anchored in the Bergen Pacific Studies Research Group at the University of Bergen. The Bergen Pacific Studies Research Group has further provided me with valuable insights into a diverse range of Pacific affairs through the members’ long-term and far-reaching Pacific research interests.

Issues of anonymity and ethical considerations

There have been a number of confidentiality considerations to make depending on the fieldwork’s locus and my own levels of engagement. I have therefore taken a number of confidentiality measurements to present my ethnographic material in order to prevent any use of information that might inflict damage on people who have shared their thoughts and experiences with me. Some names used in the dissertation are pseudonyms and sometimes place-names have been left out. However, a great amount

of the information collected also comes from public events with public figures whose communication has been published by media or in other public outlets. It has made little sense to anonymise this, as the information is publically available.

In addition to taking my own approaches to ensure anonymity, I have also been careful to adhere to principles concerning disclosure of information as deemed necessary in particular settings. This has been of particular importance while attending meetings that are closed for public, such as meetings at the UN Climate Change Conferences that are only for *Parties to the Convention* at the *Conference of the Parties*.⁹ Parties to the Convention are countries that are signatories to the UNFCCC and attend the conferences as country delegations. As a country delegate, one has access to meetings that are otherwise closed for the public, but delegates must adhere to guidelines of confidentiality and conduct of meetings (United Nations 1991; United Nations 1992). This is the prevailing situation under which my participation at the UN climate negotiations meetings has taken place. As I was an accredited member of the delegation for Palau during such meetings, the materials I have used in this research are mostly based on publicly available information and events, and not on information from closed meetings. Attending negotiations as part of a Pacific delegation has, however, opened up my understanding of the underlying processes that are not always publicly available.

Local and national governments in all fieldwork locations approved the research. I also worked closely with University of South Pacific in Fiji, Solomon Islands National Museum, and Bureau of Cultural and Historical Preservation in Palau. The respective staff provided excellent advice on appropriate research protocol in each location. Furthermore, this research has followed the National Committees for Research Ethics' ethical guidelines as endorsed by the University of Bergen.

⁹ The conferences serve as the formal meetings of the Conference of the Parties (COP), the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Kyoto Protocol (CMP) and the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Paris Agreement (the CMA).

Expanding fieldwork

In the following section, I wish to provide an overview of sites, temporalities, and ethnographic engagements, to provide an insight into the expanding and cumulative nature of my fieldwork.

On the second day after officially starting as a PhD Candidate in 2013, I found myself on a plane headed to Hawai'i, followed by a trip to Fiji. The (flying) start of this project thus reflects some of the intensity that has characterised much of the ethnographic work that provides the basis for this study. In April 2013, I spent a total of one month in Honolulu, Hawai'i and Suva, Fiji. While in Hawai'i, I attended the Waves of Change conference at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. Whilst in Fiji I stayed in Suva conducting interviews and documentary research at the University of South Pacific, but also spending time in the Rewa delta district outside of Suva, as well as on Gau island, west of Viti Levu. In December 2013, I returned to Suva for the ECOPAS opening conference, followed by two weeks in Honiara, Solomon Islands. In July 2014, I started my fieldwork in Suva, where I spent two and a half months. In September 2014, I stayed two weeks in Samoa for the UN-SIDS conference where I participated as an accredited observer on behalf of ECOPAS.

From October to December 2014, I conducted fieldwork in Solomon Islands while working on a joint ECOPAS project together with the Solomon Islands National Museum. For the majority of the time I lived in Honiara, but also in Malaita as I worked closely together with fieldworkers from that province. From January until June 2015, I stayed in Palau. I was mainly based in the capital Koror, but I also spent a considerable amount of time in a northern state and divided my time between the two locations. In December 2015, I spent three weeks in Paris, France as an accredited member of the Palau delegation at the UN climate conference COP21. In August 2016, I spent another month in Palau. In December 2016, I attended COP22 in Marrakech, Morocco, and in November 2017, I attended COP23 in Bonn, Germany, again as part of the Palau delegation.

As a way of further understanding the scope of the research, I ended up accumulating most time in Palau, which is why in Chapter 4 I provide a more in-depth account of this Pacific country. Grasping the dynamics of everyday life undoubtedly

enriches, enlarges and deepens the ethnography, as found throughout all traditions of anthropological practice. Yet, the analytical scope of my fieldwork goes beyond Palau.

The figure below illustrates the travel, trajectory and ethnographic presences outlined above, as they occurred at different locations and times since 2013.

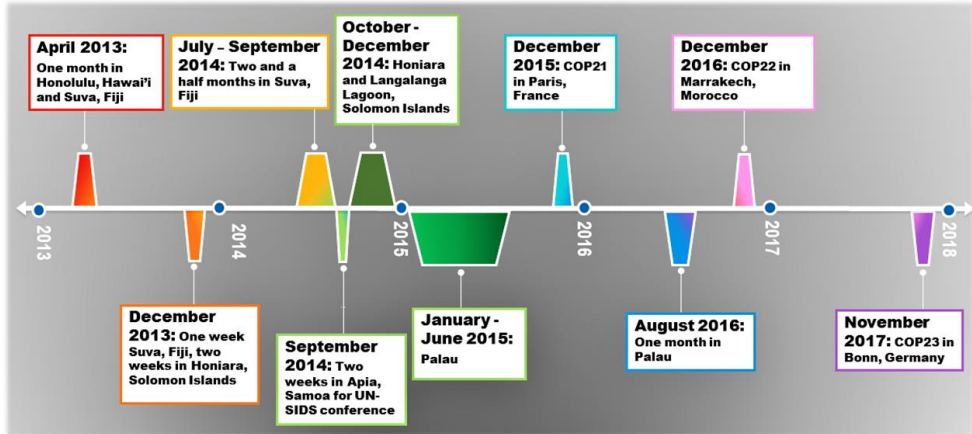


Figure 1: Fieldwork overview. This diagram provides an overview of the expanding scope of the fieldwork, including a multitude of sites and temporalities, illustrating visually a multi-sited and multi-temporal fieldwork strategy.

In addition to the above overview, I had a number of trips during these years to Brussels, Belgium, for several reasons. First, to follow up on ECOPAS calls and collaborations with the European Parliament and the European External Action Service (EEAS). Second, to have meetings with EU actors as part of the University of Bergen's outreach strategy. For the whole of 2016, I had monthly one-week stays in Brussels to work for the University of Bergen's Brussels office and to gain an understanding of EU decision-making processes and happenings.

Through all of these visits over the years, I have gained insights into the workings of the relationship between the EU and Oceania. Being able to witness how decisions made in Brussels have reached countries in Oceania has been valuable for my understanding of ongoing trans-regional processes.

My interest and engagement with Oceania, however, began over a decade ago, while living for one year in Hilo as an exchange student at the University of Hawai'i in 2006-2007. This was followed by completing a Master's degree at the Australian National University and working within various capacities in Canberra from 2008 to

2011. The proximity of Australia to the Pacific Islands influenced my academic interests and understanding of regional relationships and mechanisms. This included, amongst others, working at the Royal Norwegian Embassy in Canberra, which provided me with an in-depth comprehension of the workings of a diplomatic mission and tending to diplomatic relations between Norway and several Pacific countries.

Methodological approaches

The main methodological approach for this research has been participant observation, as well as informal and semi-structured interviews and conversations. Continuously throughout my fieldwork period, conversation and interaction were main priorities. Early on, I got to know key people with whom I maintained regular contact throughout my entire stay in each location while in the Pacific region. These included a wide-range of people from highly diverse backgrounds, with broad representation from both women and men, and age groups ranging from youth to elders. For my work within policy areas, both national and international, the group of people have predominantly consisted of adults who have a formal education and work within policy-related fields such as government, law, consultancy, development planning and more.

We met on a regular basis and often spent hours talking about a broad range of issues or we would go on trips to various locations on land or at sea. Depending on the setting and occasion, the style of interaction with people varied from simply observing and chatting, to semi-structured interviews, and meeting-style conversations. In exploring the day-to-day life of the islanders, I observed and participated in everyday work in environmental zones more or less affected by the onset of climate change, as well as other daily events as they took place. It also involved seeking out specific localities with a particularly strong record of dealing with environmental disaster to access a deeper understanding of relations to the changing environment, as well as observing if or how day-to-day life is affected. Living with a local family during my stay in Palau further provided me with a deeper understanding of daily life.

I also spent numerous hours in libraries, at the archives, museums, and other offices that had valuable resources, for example at Solomon Islands National Museum, Palau Bureau of Cultural and Historical Preservation, Belau National Museum, and the Palau Community College Library. Through participant observation, interactions,

conversations, and literary research I built up a long written list of topics and further research questions in a cumulative manner. This ever-growing document became important not only as guide to issues that were important to gain more learning, but moreover as an indicator of how issues may relate and their relevance for further analysis. The document's value as a research method in itself was for me based on its growth over time, but also, recognising its growth from place-to-place.

In each location, I tried to meet with people from various backgrounds, different ages, genders, and interests. This included talking to 'the grassroots', learning from relevant community organisations and projects, and participating in national climate change initiatives (such as the creation of Palau's national climate change policy). Furthermore, it included following developments in national politics, public discourse in the media, talking to local actors who work on climate change issues across levels, and then following international climate discourses and processes all the way to UN climate change conferences through my interlocutors.

In that sense, as phrased by Edvard Hviding (2012:217), "I have allowed events and relationships to lead me out and about". This is in line with Marilyn Strathern's (1995:13) idea of the anthropological method, in viewing fieldwork as learning through "entering relations with those whose social life they were studying". Similarly, my engagements in one location led me to expanding my research into others. The most prominent example of this is how the relationships I entered into in Palau opened up the opportunity to participate at COP21 in Paris, as part of the technical team in the Palauan delegation. Participating as a member of the delegation, and thereby participating in the day-to-day work that comes with such very specific work, may in that sense serve as an example of "engaged anthropology" (see for example Howell 2010; Baer 2012).

The same may be argued about my engagement and work with fieldworkers from Langalanga Lagoon through the joint project with Solomon Islands National Museum. This involved teaching others about anthropological methods, organising workshops and collaborating with the fieldworkers on the gathering of information. My view on engaged anthropology follows a conceptualisation of the term in its 'wider

form', as defined by Tone Bringa and Synnøve Bendixen (2016).¹⁰ They argue that areas of engagement in its wider form includes elements of collaboration and partnership, outreach, and policy initiatives, all of which rings true for my own fieldwork and research (Bringa and Bendixen, 2016:7). In that sense, parts of my fieldwork has involved what Susan A. Crate (2011:188) encourage anthropologists to do in their efforts on climate change, which is that of "getting to work". Such encouragement is however a point that I will elaborate more on later in this chapter when discussing the calls for anthropological engagement on climate change matters.

Potentials of the multi: Multi-level, multi-sited, multi-scalar

Bronisław Malinowski's early ethnography from the Trobriand Islands may be seen as a baseline for the development of anthropological fieldwork methods. The traditions of fieldwork with in-depth observations and analysis of everyday life has served as important inspiration for generations of anthropologists. Sir Edward Evan Evans-Pritchard's vision of fieldwork was one where the ethnographer had to spend a very long time in the field, preferably several years (1962:76). This underlined the importance of 'being there' according to Clifford Geertz (1988), as it provided anthropologists with the characteristically 'thick description' (Geertz 1973). Some of these early ethnographic traditions have, however, in more recent times been criticised for a form of analytical isolation in ignoring the wider networks and global connections (Hastrup 2013a:275). Furthermore, anthropology has had to rethink its own role as a discipline in post-colonial times, particularly considering the realisation that anthropologists were themselves 'writing culture' (see Marcus and Clifford 1986).

The fieldwork methodology has nevertheless maintained a strong hold within the discipline and plays an important role to shape the development of anthropology itself (see for example Gupta and Ferguson 1997). Through being present over a longer period of time, the anthropologist slowly accumulates information and an understanding about the field. Participant observation entails being engaged in people's

¹⁰ Bringa and Bendixen (2016) discuss in their introductory chapter the various ways of defining the actions of anthropologists that can be included as examples of an "engaged anthropology". They point to the notions of "applied anthropology" or "public anthropology" and show how these have been associated with various roles as activist or in advocacy, as media spokesperson, or as critics and more (2016:5). Drawing on the extensive experiences of Scandinavian anthropologists (that include all of the aforementioned roles and others), they therefore suggest a wider use of the term "engaged anthropology".

everyday lives, and provides micro-level insights. More importantly, fieldwork allows anthropologists to build “relations of trust” (Barnes et al, 2013:541) as anthropologists “surrender to the field” (Hannerz, 2003:209). Through conversations in the field, the anthropologist gets insights that go well beyond the local which “enables a new understanding of the inherent complexity of scaling and of the field itself as a plastic space, where the fieldworker’s attention may stretch and bend according to the situation and perspective” (Hastrup, 2013a:145).

In comparison with early views on ethnographic fieldwork, my own fieldwork goes across several scales, levels, and locations, and thereby represents a form that may go against the grain of more traditional perceptions of ethnography. Contemporary anthropological attitudes are, however, increasingly moving away from the idea that long-term and single-site fieldwork is the only way to gain an understanding, as it often depends on what is being researched in the first place. Kirsten Hastrup (2013a:146) shows this when she argues that “fields are as emergent as are anthropological interests”. It is not about understanding everything in one particular place, she further argues, but rather “a particular perspective upon it” (Hastrup, 2013a:147). In order to do so, Hastrup suggests that we need to address “the *scaling effect* of all ethnographic writings” (original emphasis, 2013a:147) in order to open up to fields of different sizes and shapes (for discussion on varieties of fieldwork, see Gupta and Ferguson 1997). I hold these suggestions by Hastrup as useful, especially in consideration of the diverse and globalised complexities of climate change as anthropological interest. A more ‘flexible’ approach is therefore both necessary and important and I argue for a method that includes multiple scales, levels, and locations -- perhaps what one could call a ‘multi-approach’ of sorts.

A key figure to draw upon here is George Marcus (1995:96) who early on in this debate stated that through the multi-sited method, the ethnographer is able to ethnographically construct life-worlds of various subjects in addition to capturing the larger processes involved by revealing the connections found between the various field localities. Marcus (1995:105) argued that

Multi-sited research is designed around chains, paths, threads, conjunctions, or juxtapositions of locations in which the ethnographer establishes some form of literal,

physical presence, with an explicit, posited logic of association or connection among sites that in fact defines the argument of the ethnography.

It is as such a useful methodological choice when having a spatially dispersed field, as it better reflects “contemporary thought on space, place, scale, and boundaries” and opens up to ‘follow’ “people, connections, associations, and relationships,” as argued by Mark-Anthony Falzon twenty years later (2015:103).

With regard to topics concerning climate change issues, Myanna Lahsen points out that there are certain methodological challenges to working within the domain of climate knowledge because of its uncertainties, fragmentation and intangible discourses and perceptions (2010:165). A multi-sited approach may be rather fruitful for approaching such challenges, as it has been shown that the method juxtaposes global and local as parallels and integrated as both discursive and place-based, and *not* as separated (Falzon, 2015:103). This implies that the ethnographer may physically or conceptually move, in order to further understand the foundation for such uncertainties, fragmentations and perceptions. In using the method to study climate scientists and their production of climate knowledge, Werner Krauss (2009:150) notes how “multi-sited ethnography of climate change means [...] to follow climate scientists and to enter the network where climate change is simultaneously constructed as a universal and localized as a particular”. It highlights the flexibility of the method, as a way to follow the interlocutors, while juxtaposing scales and levels of climate change issues.

Multi-sited method has, however, received critique for renunciation of the ethnographic tradition, for unrealistic holism and for lacking the necessary depth of study (for an in-depth review of this critique, see Falzon 2015). This lack of depth is, according to Ghassan Hage (2005), a result of trying to take on an overly holistic approach through following the sometimes global connections or trajectories. Hage argues that it is more useful to do research in a single site, as the social relations within and to the field “get[s] thicker” (2005:465). This, he claims, is impossible when doing multi-sited fieldwork, because no ethnographer can really capture the social relations if being rushed between places in an attempt to capture it all (2005:467). Multi-sited ethnography thus becomes “torn between the ‘big picture’ and the boundaries of a restricted field site” (Krauss, 2009:149). One danger of this, pointed out by Ulf

Hannerz (2003: 207), is that the ethnographer is not able to gain a complete “grasp of the entire field”. Furthermore, by taking the approach of following, the ethnographer’s level of engagement has been questioned, in fear of becoming passive (Falzon 2015). The lack of a thick description also puts the quality of the ethnographic material in danger, as suggested by Michael Burawoy (2003:673) when he argues that “[b]ouncing from site to site, anthropologists easily substitute anecdotes and vignettes for serious fieldwork”.

Turning to my own method then, have I simply passively ‘bounced’ from site to site? What have I gained by applying a multi-sited approach? I would argue that I have attained a particular perspective on some of the core challenges for Pacific people relating to climate change, which concern issues of understanding that cross both levels and scales. By this I mean that through applying a method that allowed my fieldwork to expand by actively following interlocutors and discourses, I could experience for myself how climate change knowledges travel, transform, and are created. Instead of *losing* sense of the meaning of place, new meanings opened up. I saw connections through similarities and dissimilarities, as climate change experiences were shared and disseminated across levels, sites and scales. Through fieldwork outside of the Pacific and away from the islands, I gained an understanding of the global relevance of the region and the Pacific Islands themselves. Through a multi-temporal and “cumulative fieldwork” (Hviding, 2012:111), developments over time took shape and provided another level of comprehension to my research. To paraphrase Clifford Geertz (1973), it is in other words my hope and intention that perspectives gained through my fieldwork and this analysis comes across as ‘thick’ as opposed to ‘thin’, and may serve as a contribution to understanding the recent dynamics of Pacific people facing diverse issues and manifestations of climate change.

Multi-sited is then far from ‘bouncing’ around, but rather about opening up new possibilities of analysis. In line with this, Falzon (2015:105) notes that a multi-sited method opens up possibilities of place:

... multisited ethnography may be many things, what it certainly is not (or should not be) is an approach that devalues locality and place. On the contrary, multisitedness properly done has the potential to produce a knowledge that highlights the specifics of place and local experience and the hierarchies that these exist within, and that in turn provides the basis for an informed critique of place and location. In other words, multisitedness assumes

that place still matters. The alternative would be a spatial multisitedness, a notion that mocks itself so effectively that hardly any explanation is required.

Hannerz (2003) similarly sees the multi-local as an opportunity, although he points out that multi-local is a bit ‘misleading’ because much of the research is based on topics that are translocal in themselves, so there are challenges to “constituting the multi-site field” (Hannerz, 2003:206). This, according to Hannerz, implies that multi-sited fieldwork is different from comparative study of localities, because the emphasis is rather on the important connections and linkages within the research. Both Falzon and Hannerz here make important points that substantiate the perspectival potential of a multi-sited and multi-scalar approach. Place still plays a very important role, even when the fieldwork includes multiple locations, as argued by Hviding (2012:224): “[c]omparison is not necessarily to be carried out between places, but within places”.

A similar line of thought may be applied to describe the very different and diverse places that have served as field-sites for this study, while arguing for their interlinkages and connections. ‘Place’ in Oceania is a substantial aspect of islanders’ lives and identities. In Fiji, Solomon Islands, Palau and other Pacific countries, the link between people and land is very strong (see Keesing 1982 for Solomon Islands, or Toren 1995 for examples from Fiji). For Fijians, a person is in itself a material manifestation of place, and a change in time is also a change in place. This is, according to Christina Toren (1995:162), an example of “time emplaced”. Place does not only consist of physical surroundings, but forms part of people’s embodied experiences and histories because “people are the land’s very substance” (Toren, 1995:614).

But, what substance can be said to make up a UN climate conference? It is not easy to define what kind of place a COP constitutes. Every year, the COP is held in a different country, yet even in spite of this, the COP event in itself can be said to be the same. On an organisational level and in terms of appearance, the characteristically large white tents, the security areas, the meetings rooms, the walls, chairs, tables, TV screens and other elements of the set-up, are highly recognisable from one COP to the next. Although with variations from year to year, efforts are made to maintain the physical form recursive and alike. This ensures a sense of familiarity with the participants, who,

if having attended such a conference before, will find the setting familiar and know his or her way around the premises more easily.

My own experiences of doing “mega-event ethnography” (Little, 1995:274) at three consecutive COPs found them to be strangely familiar, yet at the same time vastly different from one year to the next. The familiarity and recognisable social form made my participation from a fieldworker perspective easier, in that I gained a greater procedural understanding of meetings and what and when my attendance was appropriate. J. Peter Brosius and Lisa M. Campbell have compared some of the structural characteristics that influence participation at similar events and have described their encounters as following “journeys” (2010:250). I have instead found it useful to define my participation at COP as having a ‘navigational focus’, an issue I explore further in Chapter 7. There I discuss how this level of access has equipped me with what I consider to be a ‘layered insight’ into meanings and events during COPs, as the level of accreditation decides what ‘layers’ (i.e. meetings, side events and people) one is allowed to participate in and surround oneself with. For me, and perhaps in contrast to the approach by Little (1995) and Brosius and Campbell (2010), my accreditation status and participation at three consecutive COPs was very important for my overall understanding. This relates in particular to the fact that many of the same people attended, year after year, and therefore provided a sense of familiarity and an ideal opportunity to follow up any questions I had.

Although not completely estranged from Brosius and Campbell’s ‘journey’, a navigation focus is, in my view, a more engaged way of describing ethnographic participation and approach to the “mega-event” method. “Transnational mega-events call into question traditional participant observation techniques” Little (1995:285) argues, “since the special circumstances of the object of ethnographic analysis alter both the nature of participation and observation”. Opportunities of observation are influenced by the participants’ official accreditation status that either provides or denies access to particular places and meetings within the COP. The different categories of accreditation are reflected in the colour of the badge of each participant: yellow for non-governmental organisations (NGOs), green for intergovernmental organizations (IGOs), blue for representatives of United Nations Secretariat units and bodies, orange

for media, and pink for Party (meaning participants belonging to a member state's official delegation). The individual level of participation in that sense, decides what opportunities one has for observation and focus.

Similar to observations by Brosius and Campbell (2010) and Kenneth Iain MacDonald (2010), I argue that these meetings are not isolated events, but part of interconnected work that develops over time. Events are often part of ongoing and long-term processes that influence actions and meanings (see Turner 1957), and their significance lies in what meaning people attach to the event itself (see Sahlin 1985). That does not imply that each COP is unimportant in and of itself. More specifically, as will become increasingly clear in the following chapters, each COP portrays a development of Pacific involvement in not only political decisions, but also in shaping the social form of the meetings and formal procedures. This is a significant insight I have gained through participating in several COPs, through a multi-temporal approach that allows for comparison *within* places.

I would not have obtained the same level of understanding had I not moved with my interlocutors, and expanded my fieldwork along the way. Fieldwork enables a deep sense of understanding and provides insights into particular perspectives of social life, and not necessarily the entirety of all the relations in one place. Hastrup (2013b:154) here makes an important point about moving and immersing oneself during fieldwork:

[t]o immerse, one must move along with the hunters. Evidently, one can also listen to stories about movement, but listening will not do by itself. To immerse in the flow of the story, having participated in comparable flows, also adds a dimension to the perceived intensities in narration. The very flexibility of the social makes the idea of scale as relative magnitude dissolve completely; the local social space in many ways turns out to be as global as anything, as we trace the connections between agents.

Thereby, Hastrup continues, ethnography has a "*scaling effect*" in that ethnographic descriptions cannot just remain local anymore – particularly with regard to concerns about contemporary climate change, she adds (original emphasis, 2013b:147). So, with regard to the role of the anthropologist during fieldwork, Hastrup (2013b:153) draws attention to this complexity of time and scale in our ethnographic presence, as fieldwork "is a means of exploring the vast landscape of lived lives of shifting intensities, as well as the perplexities of time, space and scale in any narrative".

And it is here, I argue, that a particular strength of the anthropological ethnographic method lies; in grasping interconnections between time, space and scale. Comparing it to the methods and foci of, say, climate science, anthropological research is on a smaller scale. Whereas climate models comprise considerably larger timespans that include variations of the entire globe, anthropologists work on a much smaller scale. Smaller scale does not mean less value and importance however. Barnes et al (2013:543) argue that it is easier to identify large scale variations connected to climatic changes such as temperatures, but that it is much more difficult to observe how everyday life is affected on a smaller scale as anthropologists do. “If one can ask ‘big’ questions of ‘small’ data,” Strathern (2005:xx) wisely notes, “then the difference between big and small disappears. It is reinstated only with the reinstatement of perspective and levels, and a concomitant sense of the partial nature of description”.

What this also means in effect, is that ethnographers may move through a range of scales and thereby also ‘switch scales’ (Strathern (2005:xvi). In *Partial Connections*, Strathern’s argues that fieldwork is both partial and total simultaneously as the ethnographer continuously switches scales: "The relativising effect of multiple perspectives will make everything seem partial; the recurrence of similarities will make everything seem connected" (Strathern 2005:xx), which resonates to my ethnographic experience ‘within places’ - including COPs as well as Pacific locations. Strathern’s idea simultaneously allows for discrepancies and similarities in anthropological research. Here, I underline the same idea for understanding climate change and to take an approach of “relations through partition” (Strathern, 2005:xxix) to allow for many distinctive stories to come through. In that sense, my methodological advances play a significant role in the overall analytical framework of this study in that I also argue for Pacific climate change stories being converted from one scale or level to another. As the following section will show, similar connections between anthropological practice and analysis are increasingly scrutinised by a growing number of anthropologists involved in climate change research calling for renewed approaches.

Anthropological calls for climate ethnography

Climate is not a new research interest for anthropologists (for an in-depth historical collection, see Dove 2014). Climate change as an anthropological concern goes back to 1975 when Margaret Mead organised the conference “The Atmosphere: Endangered and Endangering”, fronting the idea of a shared responsibility for a shared atmosphere (see Kellogg and Mead 1976). Yet, it has been argued that it is only within the last two decades or so that anthropologists have really positioned themselves as central in climate change research (Batterbury 2008; Milton 2008), despite the fact that social anthropologists have a long tradition of studying indigenous peoples’ broader ecological relations. Hence, a decade ago this discrepancy was increasingly being pointed out and anthropological action was encouraged. In this spirit, Kay Milton (in Crate, 2011:178) stated how it would be impossible for anthropologists not to get involved in climate change issues:

Although these problems may not be new, the discourse of climate change, with its scientific, economic, political, and moral dimensions, is a relatively recent arrival in that global arena, and it is changing the way local events are framed and understood. For anthropologists to neglect it would be unthinkable.

Since then, a number of larger edited contributions to an Anthropology of Climate Change have been published. These include volumes such as Crate and Nuttall 2009, Baer and Singer 2014, Barnes and Dove 2015, and Crate and Nuttall 2016. Since Susan A. Crate and Mark Nuttall published their first edited volume *Anthropology and Climate Change: From Encounters to Actions* in 2009, much has happened within the field of anthropology and climate change. This in particular applies to the sheer number of studies that have been published, but also, as Crate and Nuttall show in their second edited volume *Anthropology and Climate Change: from Actions to Transformations* (2016), the scope of anthropological interests has increased.

In this literature, anthropologists are also increasingly asking questions about what they themselves can do and what role they have in relation to climate change, leading to new developments for anthropologists as a group. Some recent initiatives include the American Anthropological Association (AAA) Task Force on Climate Change consisting of many prominent anthropologists. The Task Force published a

report called *Changing the Atmosphere* which sets up to guide anthropology's future contributions (Fiske et al, 2014). The Task Force has also published the *AAA Statement on Humanity and Climate Change*; a one-page statement declaring the threat of climate change and outlining where anthropology might contribute the most.¹¹ Anthropology as a discipline is thus becoming acutely aware of the need to step up the involvement in providing substantial contributions to understanding climate change issues, recognised most prominently through AAA's initiatives. With regard to the Pacific, there has also been an ever-growing number of contributions from anthropologists working in the region concerning climate change (see for example Lazrus 2012; Hermann 2017; Kempf 2009; Klepp 2016; Rubow 2012; Lipset 2014; Jacka 2016, and many more). However, there is still only a limited number of ethnographic monographs on the topic, with the exception of the important contribution by Peter Rudiak-Gould (2013a) from the Marshall Islands. In addition, recent contributions spanning several locations in the Pacific include Jenny Bryant-Tokalau (2018) on indigenous approaches to climate change impacts, and the recent edited volume by Tony Crook and Peter Rudiak-Gould (2018).

I argue that my own contribution through this study is one that complements both existing research and also an expansion of current anthropological studies of climate change. This is through the application of both a multi-sited approach in combination with a single-site analysis due to my ethnographic emphasis on Palau. Although anthropologists are moving into ever-expanding areas of research, there has been a predominant emphasis on topics within anthropology of climate change drawing from environmental anthropology (see for example Townsend 2009; Dove 2014). Although environmental issues play an important role in this ethnography, it is not environmental anthropology. My aim here is to provide a contribution within the anthropology of climate change, which equally led me into anthropology of policy, anthropology of meetings, and anthropology of diplomacy, as it did environmental issues. My hope is that drawing on several of these under the umbrella of climate change anthropology in combination with novel fieldwork approaches can provide a unique analysis and state-of-the-art ethnography.

¹¹ See Appendix B.

Strengths of anthropological insights

An increasing demand and need for anthropologists to get involved has been expressed, as climate change issues become ever more pressing (Kempf 2012; Crate and Nuttall 2016). Hastrup (2013a:269) points to an increasing call for contributions from social sciences, also in areas previously considered more important for climate science. For many, climate change is not visible or recognisable in their day-to-day lives, therefore many people are not particularly concerned about climate change. This is what Anthony Giddens refers to as “Giddens paradox” (2011:2). People will just “sit on their hands” instead of taking action, because the consequences are not immediate or tangible (Giddens, 2011:2). But as climate change is becoming increasingly visible, the need to understand the broader implications has also grown simultaneously. Anthropology as a discipline is well inclined to understanding day-to-day life, because of its extensive repertoire of fieldwork and qualitative methods. These approaches provide us with a close understanding of other people’s perspectives because we work “*within* the shifting environments for social action, and *with* people who live there” (original emphasis, Hastrup, 2013a:270). As such, anthropologists gain insights into impacts, perceptions, as well as resilience. We need this, Hastrup argues, because “*everybody* is affected of climate change - directly or indirectly” (my emphasis, 2013a:270).

It has been argued that the importance of qualitative research stems from the fact that “political institutions, personal relations and cultural meanings cannot be quantified or modelled in the same way as temperatures, but they strongly influence human action, and therefore need to be thoroughly understood and ... investigated with equal precision” (Barnes et al, 2013:543). According to Barnes et al (2013:541) there are three main areas where anthropology can contribute: 1) looking at “cultural values and political relations that shape climate-related knowledge creation and interpretation and that form the basis of responses to continuing environmental changes”, 2) anthropologists have in-depth knowledge about the “historical contexts underpinning contemporary climate debates”, highlighting in particular archaeology and environmental anthropology, and, 3) anthropology’s holistic view. The latter point is furthered in Barnes and Dove (2015:10) on the basis that climate change is only one

part of a larger picture that is influencing people's lives, and anthropology can therefore help 'unpack' issues.

Using holism as a distinctly anthropological contribution has, however, received some critique, as also shown in some of the responses to the multi-sited approach. In her book review of Barnes and Dove's 2015 volume, Naveeda Khan (2016:762) argues that:

The concept of holism in anthropology often privileges the idea of a whole over parts and its determination through social facts. In other words, holism has historically not been about searching for all possible determinants of change but rather about searching for specific facts considered to structure and represent the whole (Appadurai 1988). I repeat this bit of history of anthropological theory to suggest that climate change not be taken as one such social fact, at least not yet without further work to secure its claims upon the social.

My own reflection on this views anthropological attempts towards a holistic approach as something positive and achievable, but I am also a realist in the sense that I do not believe it is possible to obtain a 'fully' holistic overview. Yet I believe there is value in striving for this approach, as it makes anthropologists turn their focus on elements and connections that might otherwise be overlooked by other disciplines.

Susan Crate (2011:179) in a similar fashion divides her review of "contemporary climate culture studies" into two main areas: 1) place-based community research, and 2) global negotiations and discourses. In the first, she highlights previous studies' focus on local effects of climate change, especially people's ability to maintain cultural frameworks when threatened. She further argues that there are four particularly important areas of focus for place-based community research, which include studies of ethnoclimatology, resiliency, disaster and displacement, and resource management. Secondly, she explores the areas where anthropologists have been involved in what she calls 'global negotiations and discourses'. Herein is included a broad range of topics, such as human rights, security, policy, politics, energy, consumptions, carbon, negotiations, and more. The sheer number of areas represent both the all-encompassing characteristics relating to climate change studies, as well as providing room for reflecting on the comprehensive volume of anthropological literature that has been published recently in so many areas.

Throughout the review Crate highlights particular spaces where anthropologists may be useful, and shows examples of researchers working together as advocates for indigenous peoples, as interdisciplinary collaborators, or as “links between local realities and decision makers” (2011:183). Following this, she states:

[A]nthropologists have much to be congratulated for in terms of their contributions to local to global understandings of how climate change is affecting our worlds. We also need to push the boundaries further. Anthropologists need to become more globalized as agents for change by being more active as public servants and engaging more with non-anthropological approaches regarding climate change.

This is an area that I find particularly important, as anthropologists may be very useful as ‘links’, or - as I would perhaps suggest instead as a more active approach - as ‘bridging’ (Johnson 2016). Anthropologists may take on a role as bridges, especially within the field of diplomacy, as I have experienced myself through my own fieldwork (see also Latour 2013; Marsden, Ibañez-Tirado, and Henig 2016). There are other examples of similar work, such as by Edvard Hviding (2016) who through his engaged work at the connections between the EU and Oceania has shown how anthropologically-driven bridging is possible. Through such engagements I believe anthropologists do have the potential to become “more globalized as agents of change”, as called for by Crate above.

Challenges for anthropology

The potential for anthropological involvement in climate change research is, in other words, substantial. Yet, claims have been made that anthropology’s own voice in discussions until now has been marginal (Barnes et al. 2013:541). One reason is that discussions around climate change have largely favoured the natural sciences. Part of the reason for this (and perhaps in contrast to the long list of areas of anthropological engagement mentioned above), may be because of what Lahsen (2010) argues to be a too limited scope. She argues that although important studies are emerging, they are too narrow in their scope and too focused on “indigenous, ‘traditional,’ and ‘marginal’ peoples and victims, at the expense of the broader populations and the elites who are largely responsible for creating the threat through their life-styles and decision-making processes” (Lahsen, 2010:165). For this reason, she continues, “anthropologists still engage only timidly with the issue of climate change” (2010:165).

Although a long standing focus for anthropology has been on indigenous knowledges (see for example Posey 1985; Fairhead and Leach 1995) showing that indigenoussness can be of great importance (see for example Brosius 1999; Muehlebach 2001), I am wary of the possible matters of limitation that Lahsen points out. And, as Hastrup has reminded us in that regard, knowledge is always a dynamic domain and will always be empirical (2016:42-43). That means, she argues, that anthropologists should rather focus on the empirical basis of climate change experiences and observations (2016:43), which complies with the approach of this study as well.

Another critique by Hastrup (2013a) is directed towards the more American tradition of Cultural Anthropology. Hastrup (2013a) – in support of Kempf (2012) - furthers the critique as a consequence of being too focused on aspects of culture. One such example, is the abovementioned review by Crate, as a review of “contemporary climate *culture studies*” (my emphasis, 2011:179). Hastrup argues that although arguments within such frames are meant to provide explanations of how people perceive and explain climate change this may present instead a “stagnant view on culture” (2013a:275).

An additional point to make with regards to American anthropology is that within the American tradition, archaeology is often included within the discipline. This is exemplified, amongst others, in the edited works by Crate and Nuttall (2009; 2016) using archaeology as examples of anthropological contributions of understanding the past. Although the past is a highly relevant perspective to understanding the present, archaeology is not necessarily considered part of the anthropological discipline within European traditions of the field that rather takes after British traditions of Social Anthropology. However, Anthropology of Climate Change is an area of study experiencing substantial growth in terms of overall contributions across the world. Divides of disciplinary traditions are most definitely not set in stone, and there is much to be learned by these subtle differences. Many anthropologists are also using climate change as a continuous research topic to develop their ideas over time and thereby revisit their own analysis or paradigms, of which an updated second edition of Crate and Nuttall’s (2016) edited volume from the first book (2009) also serves as a good example.

Calls for a renewed Anthropology

To sum up, anthropologists are increasingly stepping up their research within the field of climate change and expanding their areas of study. This relative proliferation of recent contributions has also led to an apprehension by several anthropologists regarding where anthropology as a discipline needs further development. Following this, there have been calls for renewing anthropological methods and areas of focus. Lahsen, (2010) early on, pointed out the need for anthropology to look more closely at the human dimension of knowledge, drawing in particular on her work with climate scientists. In relation to that, she argues that the social scientists have to undertake a “critical reading of the natural sciences, that is a spatially contingent view of knowledge” to fully open up for the different perceptions of climate change (2010:164).

In particular, according to Lahsen, that means looking more closely at issues such as power, privilege, and knowledge or ideologies. The way to achieve this, she suggests, is by doing “anthropological work on how knowledge and framings do or do not travel across uneven power networks” (2010:165) and to explore the complexity of actors that are involved in multiple scales around the same issues. Lahsen (2010:165) is therefore calling for anthropology to reject the divide between theory and application-oriented research in order to make important contributions. She further underlines that anthropology needs a “radical rethink” about the way we approach the construction of knowledge (2010:164). This is because ‘human dimensions’ are understood in a limited manner, and that provides reflections of cultures and beliefs just as “a set of factors among others”. Therefore, she argues, a “radical rethink” is needed to “understand knowledge itself as a cultural product” (2010:164).

Crate (2011:177) on the other hand, is calling for a “refocus” of anthropological ethnography. She suggests that we may do this through what she labels “climate ethnography” which is the development of a critical collaborative and multi-sited ethnography. By collaborative, she means that anthropologists must more actively use their ‘bridging’ skills to “bridge local understandings beyond the local to the multitude of stakeholders and on a multitude of scales” and to participate more actively in the field (2011:177). “Climate ethnography,” Crate (2011:185) claims, “... is tied to the global phenomenon and communicates a sense of immediacy and of an ethnography

with a mission”. Critical collaborative ethnography will, according to her, reveal “the gaps between local and global”, thereby drawing on Tsing’s (2004) earlier calls for an ‘ethnography of global connection’ (2011:177). Crate states that this is very important as it further opens up for ethnography that includes a multiplicity of scales, such as through a multi-sited approach, in order to address the “scalar disparity” between global and local that has existed in climate research (2011:185). But this cannot happen, she argues, without anthropologists “getting to work” by learning the ‘languages’ of other disciplines and showing the value of anthropological research (2011:188):

From a base of multisited, critical collaborative ethnography with new multiscale multitemporal, multistakeholder measures of adaptation and cultural frames and cognitive models, the possibilities in climate ethnography are expansive. Anthropologists need to study and communicate the ethnography of science ... and to become more comfortable with doing science by learning the language(s) of science. ... We need to educate others that our skills associated with “being there” and of participant observation and our other methods of “knowing” require highly developed skill sets. I argue that the best way to educate is to show others what anthropology can do, by rolling up our sleeves and getting to work.

A final call that I would like to include is that of Hastrup (2013a) who is suggesting that there is a need for a “refashioning” in anthropology. As she explains: “Present global concerns about climate change necessitate a refashioning of anthropology” that has to “pay attention to the emergent global imaginaries.” (Hastrup, 2013a:269). It is in particular this ‘global imaginary’ that is the driving factor for reviewing the disciplinary focus, because it represents an all-encompassing global connection that stands in contrast to anthropology’s traditions of focus. She argues this on the basis of the theoretical traditions of anthropology largely being based on “social encounters” and not “planetary concerns” (original emphasis, 2013a:270):

The new realities of global connection through *climate* outstretch all anthropological theories about locality, sociality, and connectivity, and time has come not only to review the ways in which anthropology has recently embraced climate and contributed to climate studies, but also to take stock of the *theoretical* implications for an anthropology that was founded in direct social encounters rather than in planetary concerns. ... ‘climate change’ potentially contributes to a refashioning of anthropology itself.

Also inspired by Tsing’s (2005) notion of an ethnography of global connection, Hastrup further argues that anthropologists should work to accept the “global space for communicative action” that are prevalent in much of the discourse on climate change

(2013a:277). This includes discourses of ‘the globe’ and long-term timescales that are different from the more “local facts” based approaches of anthropologists (2013a:277). By looking at the ways we communicate and speak about these dimensions, Hastrup suggests that ‘frictions’ may be exposed, thus continuing ideas of Tsing. Beyond understanding how climate change impacts different societies or ‘a culture’, Hastrup (2013a:279) argues that anthropologists can exemplify and show how “actions even at the smallest scale influence the flows on the macroscopic surface, and *vice versa*”. Thereby, it shows how human agency and social responsibility plays a large role in finding the solutions necessary. Her suggested approach has been well-received (see Kempf 2012), as it suggests not only methodological aspects, but an integration of analysis *and* method.

Reflections and analytical approach

In summary, in their research on climate change, anthropologists are asked to “rethink”, “refocus”, and “refashion”. Lahsen, Crate, and Hastrup all call for an approach that considers multiple scales, highlighting the importance of grasping the global and local connections. Crate also underlines the necessity amongst anthropologists to “roll up their sleeves and getting to work” (2011:188). In my own methodological approach, I have found it highly insightful to ‘get to work’, as already shown, through participating as part of the Palau delegation at UNFCCC meetings, but also working closely with Langalanga fieldworkers in Solomon Islands. It has provided me with an experience of what one could categorise as global connections, doing participant observation in a multi-scalar and multi-temporal fashion. Furthermore, participating as I did in the drafting and creation of the Palau national climate change policy has been very instructive.

Although I agree with much of what Crate argues in her calls to refocus, I also agree with the critique by Hastrup and Kempf that Crate’s cultural focus may be limiting the scope and potential of anthropological climate change research. I do not however intend to underestimate culture as an important dimension, first of all because culture has a crucial role in the Pacific and is itself an inspiration and foundation for cognitive, social and rhetorical frameworks for Pacific involvement in international climate discussions. Yet it should not be approached as a static object in danger of

elimination by the threat of climate change. Rather, culture, as it is embedded and penetrates all social aspects and not as a confined notion, seems to take on new forms and purposes beyond a place or “the nation and its sovereign people” (Hastrup, 2013a:278), because of climate change. One of the earliest challenges to anthropological research has been that of “writing culture” (see Marcus and Clifford 1986, and Strathern 2004 for a later discussion). Anthropologists must therefore be mindful of not framing climate change and culture similarly; while some things might indeed be in danger of being lost, some may also prosper or be recreated as people are forced to become aware of particularities of sociocultural importance. It is not just about understanding how climate change affects local communities but also how any action, regardless of scale, can influence the larger picture. Local culture can, as I will show in the following chapters, feed into and influence global climate change politics.

Further, Crate divides her review into two areas: place-based and negotiations. Although it serves the purpose of delineating literary categories, I find that this division does little to further the call for a refocus and refashioning of a multi-scalar, multi-sited and global ethnography. My understanding and analytical approach to these areas are strongly intertwined. I have therefore found using *stories* in my analysis to be purposeful, as a story may travel across scales of space and time, take on different forms, and reach different actors in a way that answers all of these calls for a renewed ethnographical approach. Furthermore, it is a concept derived from Oceania itself and frequently used by Pacific people (as indicated by the excerpt from Selina Leem’s speech in Chapter 1), with strong groundings in local and regional epistemological and cosmological orientations.

I mention this in particular since I recognise a need to establish positions absent from Western frameworks that have typically dominated thinking about climate change. In that sense, the story, as a localised and simultaneously multi-scalar phenomenon -- may serve as both a methodological and analytical approach, perhaps in part answering this call by Hastrup (2013a:278):

It is this elusiveness of place that field studies now reveal, puncturing the idea of closed cultural spaces, while opening up for renewed understanding of the multiplicities of scale inherent in localized knowledge. To conceptualize and possibly outbalance the inequality of access to natural, economic, and political resources, anthropologists must recognize this.

As I entered the villages in Fiji as described in the Preface, my initial sitting down with the head of the village quickly entered a conversational and informational mode when I asked about impacts of a storm, a flood or something similar. I heard stories about how they quickly ran for shelter, how a person climbed up the highest palm tree, all while showing the marks on the house wall where the water had reached or which particular palm tree had played a key role in saving a person's life. The story in this sense functions as an entry point to the village, but also as an example of the relational dimension that a story serves. The signs on the wall, or the palm tree, become 'signs in and of history' (Parmentier 1987). If analysed with reference to methodological potential, stories can provide the base for ethnography:

When the thing traced is within the realm of discourse and modes of thought, then the circulation of signs, symbols, and metaphors guides the design of ethnography. This mode involves trying to trace the social correlates and groundings of associations that are most clearly alive (Marcus, 1995:108).

The story, I suggest, becomes a guide for the ethnography, as well as a poignant symbol of the anthropologist entering into relationships with the field.

Relations are everywhere, Strathern (1995:8-9) argues, and telling a narrative that shows them is open for anyone. Anthropologists however, "do not pursue connections simply in order to be ingenious. They route them in specific ways" (Strathern 1995:11). This means that social anthropologists "route connections through persons" according to Strathern (1995:11):

[Social anthropologists] attend to the relations of logic, of cause and effect, of class and category, that people make between things; it also means that they attend to their relations of social life, to the roles and behaviour, through which people connect themselves to one another. And habitually they bring these two domains of knowledge together, as when they talk about the relation between culture and society.

By that account, it seems to make sense that *story*, particularly in Pacific sense, also becomes part of establishing a connection not only with the ones who enter (the village), but is also used to enter elsewhere, such as the UN. This is because:

Person-to-person networks that succeed by replicating the conditions under which persons relate to one another, work, as relations do, holographically. Their power is that interpersonal relations can take any scale, be productive at any order of encounter, whether in a small university department or across the globe. It is a mistake to think they can be measured by size (original emphasis, Strathern, 1995:31)

Strathern hereby explains a frame of how to understand issues of scale and human dimensions of knowledge, as well as providing analytical room for drawing the lines between person-to-person relations to that of the global. I am thus aptly reminded of the role of a diplomat, in particular to that of being a ‘climate diplomat’, who in theory then provides both a person-to-person connection while working on the backdrop of a ‘global imaginary’.

Global connections are everywhere, and in recent years anthropologists have been moving towards ways in which people, places and ideas are connected (see e.g. Appadurai 1991; Gupta and Ferguson 1997; Tsing 2005; Orlove et al 2015). This means that many anthropologists have moved away from studying individual localities, to studies on interrelations in a globalized world (Barnes and Dove, 2015:5). My understanding and way of approaching global connections is one inspired by Strathern’s thoughts on relations, taking into account the simultaneously global and local characteristics of climate change as already outlined. Furthermore, I seek to explore the ‘refashioning’ of notions of localities. A renewed notion of locality that postulates a global entanglement and multi-scalarness, and opens up for the possibility that locality itself may be fluid. By that I mean ideas pertaining to ‘the local’ can take on new meanings and purposes, as they ‘travel’, through stories and people.

This relationship between people and place one could then argue, becomes increasingly more important because of climate change. Importantly however, it is place (and perhaps even culture) in the sense of a ‘global imaginary’, as climate change is “a global problem with stark local implications” (Hastrup, 2013a:278). ‘The local’, then, is not dissolved or obsolete, but in a global climate change imaginary it is rather dispersed. That is why it is important to ‘make place relevant’ (as mentioned in Chapter 1); a place that is part of ‘the global’ and therefore useful in terms of knowledge about the climate change phenomenon itself. Connecting this to what I have previously called ‘climate change-ness’, it reflects the relevance of place, however, in its dispersed form because of the unequal impact of climate change. Yet, for anthropologists it is not just about studying the different (or ‘local’) ways of understanding and being influenced by

climate change, it is also about how these perceptions ‘work’ in a ‘climate change world’ so to speak.

So, how may one do this? As I have already argued, applying a method that allows the ethnographer to actively ‘follow’ in Marcus’ (1995) sense is very important. Furthermore, having a focus on climate change as relation *between* and *of* the Pacific and international climate regime can in part relate to what Nader calls ‘studying up’ (Nader 1972). Most Pacific Islanders, as with the majority of people anywhere in the world, are not part of the negotiations that determine global agreements. In this sense, being part of these decision-making processes and events provides valuable insights into analysing “the culture of power rather than the culture of the powerless” (Nader, 1972:289). In her early work on ethnographic method, Laura Nader (1972) urged anthropologists to turn the approach and the anthropological focus upwards to study those who have the power to make decisions. Yet, although I recognise the need to focus ‘upwards’, I am concerned it may imply that there is a corresponding ‘downwards’.

However, my understanding of Nader is rather pointing to a much-needed focus on decision makers, and not necessarily implying hierarchical structures of the world. Nevertheless, I suggest that Tsing’s frames of “working through global connections” (2005:1) or Wright and Reinhold’s (2011) notion of ‘studying through’ has become a more suitable methodological *modus operandi* for this dissertation. The method’s strength, Wright and Reinhold claim, is found firstly in being able to track the connections between institutional scales following a multi-sited method; secondly, recognising that events may have unpredictable significance for the future; and thirdly, being aware of the historical and political contexts in which events unfold (Wright and Reinhold, 2011:101-102). Thus, the approach is useful for understanding institutional practices or following political processes due to the flexibility of combining the relation with both a theoretical and methodological approach. So, although my focus is on decision makers, institutions and bureaucracy, it also includes the Pacific region as a particular social, cultural and political arena, as well as ‘on the ground’ contexts in Palau, Solomon Islands, and elsewhere. I would furthermore argue that ‘studying through’ Oceania and climate change issues is an interesting exercise because of the

strong entanglements in Pacific island countries between ‘grassroots’ and ‘elites’, politics and kinship; which are all elements of a “compressed globalisation” (Hviding 2012) that reflects a density of global-local connections.

To conclude this chapter, I believe that employing methods of studying through multiple levels and scales have great analytical and theoretical potential in themselves, and may further open up ways of undertaking ethnography. As each particular fieldwork provides the ethnographer with certain perspectives on an issue, applying a fieldwork method that opens up for the possibility to study the entanglements of the global and the local are significant in attempting to understand climate change complexities. I am therefore strongly convinced that my methodological approach has been highly instrumental in being able to develop my analytical model. I have, as a result, gained insights into how Pacific people themselves create models with such local and global entanglements, and how many of them perceive themselves within notions of a global imaginary because of climate change. As the following chapters will show, Pacific people are creating vernacular models of ‘localising’ climate change through drawing on relational methods and techniques most familiar to them, such as storytelling.

Chapter 3

The Multifaceted Challenge of Climate Change: Glimpses from the frontlines

Introduction

‘Climate change’ is a term increasingly used in day-to-day discourse, yet its meaning can sometimes appear to be ambiguous. Some of this complexity stems from the term’s altering construction as an idea in a historical perspective (Hulme 2009a), as well as its multifaceted qualities as both a physical and discursive phenomenon alongside people’s differing experiences. In this chapter, I draw on three ethnographic cases in which climate change is a central part of the story, and that in their differing ways illustrate some of the multifaceted complexities of climate change. The cases show how climate change provides challenges as well as opportunities for the people of Oceania, and how climate change as words, physical changes, and as discourse is incorporated into societies and existing ‘traditions of knowledge’ (Barth 2002).

Case one provides examples of historical environmental changes in Palau and reflects upon the difficulties in translating climate change from English to Palauan. Case two shows how the people of Langalanga Lagoon are living with an increasing threat of sea level rise and flooding on what are considered to be ‘most vulnerable’ islands. Case three takes us to the backroom of a Pacific delegation during the 2015 UN climate change conference (COP21) and shows how climate change can be considered a skill to be mastered and as part of a ‘COP vernacular’ to be learned. The three case studies examine some of the multifaceted aspects of living with climate change in its many forms. They reflect embodied experiences of changes, as well as examples of how knowledge about climate change is configured. As isolated cases, each is valuable in its own right as they can all be said to constitute a ‘climate change frontline’ for Pacific Islanders in various capacities. I argue for the combined cases being illustrative of powerful dimensions of climate change as knowledge and by extension, foundations of Pacific climate change stories that make their way from the

Pacific Islands to the UN climate negotiations. Before a discussion and analysis of each case, I wish to begin the chapter by providing some background to the history and development of climate change as term, discourse and as part of a geological epoch, drawing particularly on existing research in anthropology, climate science, and other disciplines.

Understanding climate change

In a 1975 paper, Wallace S. Broecker (1975) asked if the world was on the brink of global warming caused by the burning of fossil fuels following the Industrial Revolution. With that, Broecker became one of the first to suggest that humans had altered the ecosystem to such a degree that we were in fact facing climate change. Yet, the relationship between climate and society goes back a long time (see Hulme 2009a for a historical overview), and is something that has occupied academics since the time of Hippocrates (see Dove 2014; 2015). Current ways of thinking about climate include claims shaped by Aristotle's idea concerning the spherical nature of the earth that later gave rise to the notion of climata zones (Hastrup, 2013a:271). The concept of climates has a long history in human societies, and Hulme (2009a:33) has therefore made the point that historical ideas about climates also reflect important developments of human societies leading us all the way to the present.

Climate can be explained through graphs that show temperatures or meteorological statistics, but climate cannot be experienced (in comparison to, say, weather phenomena like the wind or the rain). Sheila Jasanoff (2010:237) writes: "Climate ... is spatially unbounded. It is everywhere and nowhere. ... Unlike the weather, climate change occurs over spans of time that are not easily assimilated to circadian or seasonal rhythms". Jasanoff thereby points to the important difference between climate change and the weather (see also Kempf 2012; Strauss and Orlove 2003). Moreover, Hulme (2009a:3) argues, we need to understand that climate is a constructed idea that has been historically shaped and created by humans, or, as Kirsten Hastrup defines it, as "an analytical human endeavour" (2016:37). This leads us to the important point that anthropogenic climate change, then, must be understood in relation to its historical, localized and discursive contexts (see Hulme 2009a).

Hulme (2015) exemplifies this point by showing how the historical discourse of the term climate change has changed in nineteenth and twentieth centuries. His argument is that climate change today may be used as a cause of change that may even be personified, as well as used as an adjective to describe something. Hulme here makes the distinction between climate as agent and as index (2015:292). Climate as agent is causative for certain weather events and validated through impacts. Climate as index is the measurements or representations of climate. Anthropogenic climate change can be both Hulme (2015:297) argues, which in effect opens up for numerous uses for the term. That is why sometimes the use of the term “climate change” may even contradict itself, and the discourse has often been one emphasizing the environmental aspects of climate change. Hulme (2009a:360-361) therefore warns that this emphasis will lead to a misunderstanding of the climate change challenge:

If we continue to talk about climate change as an environmental problem to be solved, if we continue to understand the climate system as something to be mastered and controlled, then we have missed the main lessons of climate change. If climate means to us only the measurable and physical dimensions of our life on Earth then we will always be at war with climate.

The relationship between humans and the environment has long traditions as an area of research for anthropologists. This is not so surprising considering that the relationship between nature and culture was at the centre of the development of civilisation, particularly in Western societies, as vital in the process of the Enlightenment.¹² Yet, climate change is a challenge the world has not seen before and has been claimed to represent a break in history for this reason (see Chakrabarty 2009). Anthropologists may be forced to rethink the idea of history again (as done previously by Sahlins 2004 and Wolf 1982, for example), as climate change poses new challenges for ideas about historicity (see Barnes and Dove 2015). The term “climate change” is complicated to say the least, and that is why some have other suggestions, such as using *anthropogenic climate forcing* (Crate and Nuttall, 2016:12). Climate change as a term is nevertheless widely used today, and its many different uses show how it “can be framed and moulded, in many different ways” for different purposes (Hulme,

¹² For an historical overview of anthropology’s engagement with this area through key writings, see Michael Dove’s (2014) historical reader on Environmental Anthropology.

2009a:xxviii). Furthermore, climate change is defining a new geological epoch characterised by human impact.

Enter the Anthropocene

Because of the large-scale anthropogenic interference, it has been argued that we have now entered the Anthropocene, succeeding the Holocene, a new epoch in which humans and our actions have direct consequences for the Earth system (Crutzen and Stoermer 2000; Steffen, Crutzen, and McNeill 2007). There is however some disagreement concerning the applicability of using Anthropocene as a concept and “where the lines should be drawn” between the geological classifications (Crate and Nuttall, 2016:13). Hastrup (2013a:270) - in a similar fashion to Dipesh Chakrabarty (2009) - places the Anthropocene as an outcome of planetary consciousness emerging in the enlightenment, and argues that it strongly intertwines humanity and the climate system. It thus places a great deal of focus on humans as agents of change, an area far from unfamiliar within anthropology (see Mathur 2015 for a discussion on the analytic use of the concept). Yet there are difficulties, as Hulme (2010b:1) underlines, as “we have only tentative understanding of the implications of such a new role and only limited means at our disposal to exercise purposeful, as opposed to inadvertent, agency”.

This means, Hulme (2010b:1) argues, that the physical manifestations and cultural representations of climate change are interacting in ways that humans have no historical comparisons from which we can learn. Another challenge to experiencing such an unprecedented phenomenon is that most human beings do not necessarily have “a commonly shared understanding of climate change and its effects” to draw on when trying to understand climate change, particularly visible in areas of political will (Mathur, 2015:105). It reflects a “double-edged quality”, Nayanika Mathur (2015:105) argues, where local specificities may be erased on behalf of authoritative universalism of science and politics that shows a “scale-shifting nature of climate change” towards the global. It is time then to have a closer look at how such scales of local and global are entangled, and in some cases, disentangled.

Creating the catastrophe: Climate change as discourses

Climate change is everywhere, and it enters public discourse, everyday talk and changes our perception of the world. It is a media phenomenon, and it borrows its authority from science (Krauss, 2009:152).

Werner Krauss is right to say that climate change is everywhere; this also includes - in an ever rapidly growing sense - climate change as a discursive phenomenon. Major discourses surrounding climate change are powerful in shaping how people describe their own challenges and what responses these receive (see Connell 2013; Kelman & Gaillard 2008; Peterson & Broad 2009; Bettini 2013; Guo 2014). My approach here to the powers of discourse is one indebted to political philosopher Michel Foucault's (1972; 1980a; 1980b) view on how power and knowledge intertwine. Foucault's seminal work on discourse allows for a focus on the exchange of ideas and agendas as part of different frameworks that shape the way humans think about the world. Of particular relevance, he explores how some knowledges may be silenced, as a result of a "hierarchisation of knowledges and the effects intrinsic to their power" (1980b:85). Foucault refers to local knowledge and scientific discourse, and argues that the former must "wage its struggle" on the latter which is part of large-scale institutionalised power (1980b:84). As will become clear, this rings true to much of the discourse surrounding climate change.

In contemporary discussions, the media plays a large role in shaping and portraying climate change in order to influence public discourse (see Petersen 2007). It is often presented as a catastrophe with apocalyptic consequences, a point shown by Clare Heyward and Steve Rayner's analysis on "climate tipping points" (2016:86). They call this a trend in current climate discourse that rhetorically focuses on the world reaching points of irreversibility, abrupt change and severe consequences in the form of a catastrophe. Prominent public figures further these perspectives, one example being Al Gore who strongly fronts the catastrophe narrative through the use of dramatic imagery (see Crook 2011), combined with using science as the ultimate truth that verifies the catastrophes' 'realness' (Krauss, 2009:153). While attending his talk "the Climate Crisis" during COP21 in 2015, I was blown away by the numerous screens blasting continuous images of devastating floods, deadly fires, destructive mudslides, droughts, rainfall and much more. This was followed by frequent use of scientific

graphs and graphic visualisations in combination with the catastrophic imagery. This combination leads us to two dimensions that I want to highlight; the first relates to the strong hold of science in major climate discourse, and the second is that narratives of catastrophes shape how people think about the places that are prone to these devastating impacts.

Turning first to the role of science, the representation of science as truth is a vigorous argument when put forward by prominent public figures such as Al Gore on a stage in front of hundreds of listeners. As Foucault argues in his reflections on truth, right and power, human beings are simultaneously subjected to such productions of truth, but also, that humans also are in need of it in order to function as society (1980b:92). This can be seen through the great authority science has had to make universal statements about the global climate and shape discourse, as well as political actions (see Hulme 2009a). The performance by ‘politician-turned-climate-speaker’ Al Gore would certainly exemplify such an intermesh of discourse, science and politics. There is as such a paradox in modern science according to Steven Shapin (1999), one where scientific knowledge, if understood as objective or unbiased, is considered more valuable as a tool for political and moral goals. This paradox is also echoed in questions that concern the role of IPCC in providing scientific advice to policy makers (see for example Boehmer-Christiansen 1994a, 1994b; Barnett 2001).

Yet, there will always be a subjective element to climate science, Lahsen argues, because of the “environmental scientists’ own sociocultural and political meanings and contexts shape the knowledge they produce, believe, and promote” (2010:163). Furthermore, Krauss (2009:150) states that climate researchers themselves “become testimonies in global climate discourses” and that they therefore play a very significant role in shaping discourse itself. As stated by Hulme (2009a:76): “Science is a human endeavour, a social process, and the practices and uses of sciences are therefore always conditional upon the society and culture in which these activities are situated”. Science is ultimately “a social activity” (Krauss, 2009:150) and emotions such as anger or tensions may occur even among climate scientists (see Lahsen 2015; O’Reilly 2015).

In addition, scientific discussions around uncertainty and risk are often associated with climate change in public discourse. The impacts of uncertainty and

environmental changes have been adeptly recognised by Ulrich Beck (1992; 2002) as some of the major global threats in the 21st century calling it the ‘world risk society’ as a result of modernity and industrialisation. Many have made the claim that science must take into account the elements of risk and uncertainty if the research is to be useful (see for example Funtowicz and Ravetz 1994; Latour 1998; Funtowicz and Strand 2007). However, science is not the only way, and in the case of most Pacific Islanders it is not even the primary one in which most people experience climate change and risk. This is perhaps best illustrated by a short example.

A Marshallese teacher once told me about some of the challenges working on the science curriculum in the Marshall Islands. Consisting of 24 low lying coral atolls, the Marshall Islands has been flagged as one of the most exposed countries in the world to environmental impacts of climate change. The teacher, responsible for preparing the science curriculum for local schools, told me about the challenge of including the concept of risk and environmental change in the curriculum. The main challenge was related in particular to the way in which Marshallese people understand risk. A Marshallese student had told the teacher: “We don’t have risk. We have people who look at the wind, and judge the tides and the waves, and the journeys go without risk”. “According to them” the teacher said to me, “there is no such thing as risk in the Marshall Islands. But there is chance”.

For many Marshallese people, the concept of calculating the percentage of risk as defined by IPCC and many other scientists is not necessarily applicable as a valid concept. Peter Rudiak-Gould (2013a) shows this in great detail through analysing how Marshallese perceptions of risk are characterised by a moral narrative, rather than one relating to danger. Rudiak-Gould turns to the importance of existing “trajectory narratives” among Marshallese to explain this, and argues that trajectory narratives provide the basis for understanding risk as well as climate change (2013a:10). For many people in the Marshall Islands, Rudiak-Gould finds that this includes narratives of traditionalist moral decline (2013a:10-11). The example from Marshall Islands shows how recognising such different narratives can help in both the understanding and framing of climate change.

This leads us to another paradox that Barnett and Campbell call the “paradoxical role of science” (2010:3). On one side, climate science remains vital as it creates awareness about the possible environmental risks. On the other side, however, these science models and approaches dominate global discussions and therefore silence and marginalise other knowledges and approaches. This silence is sustained, Barnett and Campbell argue, “because as more scientific research is conducted in the name of reducing the uncertainties that are purported to impede action, new questions arise and further uncertainties can emerge” (Barnett and Campbell, 2010:3). The way many Pacific Islanders perceive climate change is a cultural and social activity that shapes how people create meaning (Hulme, 2009a:208). In a somewhat dichotomous portrayal, Sheila Jasanoff (2010:235) argues that meaning emerges from experience, while scientific models and calculations are created through observation. She continues:

Climate change, on this account, is problematic because it tends to separate the epistemic from the normative, divorcing it from ought. Crudely put, it detaches global fact from local value, projecting a new, totalizing image of the world as it is, without regard for the layered investments that societies have made in worlds as they wish them to be (Jasanoff, 2010:236).

Jasanoff further argues that scientific frameworks are influencing locally based understandings of climate change. It is however her mention above of ‘projections of the world’ that brings me to my second point concerning images and representations of places and climate change.

Discourses surrounding Marshall Islands internationally is one where crisis looms large, often described as sinking islands or a country drowning (see Rudiak-Gould 2013; 2016). Similar narratives are found when talking about the Himalayas as ‘fragile’ (see Mathur 2015) or Bangladesh as “a poster child for vulnerability” (Finan and Rahman 2016:176). Orlove et al. (2015) therefore argue that certain topographies and places have received considerable focus in climate change discourse, such as islands or the Arctic, while others, like deserts, have been less associated with climate change. Imagery, such as those used by Al Gore, showing an eroding beach on a tropical island, or a disappearing glacier become what Mike Hulme (2009a:236) calls “the Iconography of Climate Change”. This iconography derives from the challenge media and others (including scientists) have in visualising the climate, as mentioned at

the beginning of this chapter. Hence, to make climate change visual, images of floods, eroding beaches, or starving polar bears are fronted. “The aim”, Mike Hulme (2009a:237) explains, “is to make the invisible global climate, visible and local in new ways”. But to what extent does this influence perception of place and climate change?

Elizabeth Marino and Peter Schweitzer (2016) argues that such iconographies and associated discourses of catastrophe influence how others may think of these places in a restricting way. A similar argument is made by Lazrus and Farbotko (2012) who states that outside media coverage of Tuvalu as “victims” part of “a catastrophe” are furthering a view that marginalizes Tuvaluans politically and frames them as helpless. Drawing on their research with the Iñupiat in Northwestern Alaska, Marino and Schweitzer (2016) ask to what end this climate change discourse has affected these indigenous communities. On one hand, it can be helpful as a ‘vocalising tool’ in that it provides the Iñupiat and other indigenous groups with a spotlight that can be taken advantage of. On the other, they do however question whether it will actually provide opportunities for political change or adaptation opportunities. Marino and Schweitzer therefore ask: “*Can* global discourse be flexible enough for multiple perspectives and then solutions for climate change challenges within diverse vernaculars?” (original emphasis, 2016:204). And with this question, it is timely to look closer at the examples from my own fieldwork.

Bearing in mind the issues of climate change discourse and knowledge as presented above, the three cases illustrate ethnographically how perspectives, experiences and knowledges all come to play in different ways for Pacific islanders facing climate change in various forms. While the first case looks at linguistic challenges and climate change causation, the second case explores life on islands that are ‘most vulnerable’ to climate change, and finally, the third case describes a setting far away from the Pacific, but nevertheless takes us to the heart of Marino and Schweitzer’s questions above to look at areas of flexibility and possibility for Pacific Islanders within the global discourse.

CASE 1: Winds of change, Palau

Palau is a small country in the Micronesian Pacific with a population of around 20,000 and is the western-most island group in the Pacific Ocean. Palau consists of over 300 islands and one main archipelago. The largest island is called Babeldaob and is home to the capitol Ngerulmud. Palau is divided into sixteen traditional municipalities or states as they are referred to by Palauans, each with numerous hamlets where people live. While staying in Palau for six months in 2015, I spent quite a lot of time in a more northern municipal state, away from the busy pace of life found in the more urban municipal state of Koror in the south. Nowadays, most people from the north work in Koror and visit only during weekends. I would, however, drive up and spend several days in the north talking to people, going for walks and spending time with Protected Areas Network rangers. I found that it provided me with a complementary view of Palauan life: here I would learn about Palauan history while wandering through the many hundred-year-old traditional paths leading to villages and endless amounts of stone face monoliths hidden in the dense forests.

Of particular importance to me were my talks with a retired teacher, Jacob. We would talk for hours and he never gave up on teaching me Palauan language, although my attempts of speaking were rather dire. On this day, like we always did, Jacob and I were sitting outside his house on the porch in the late morning heat. It was particularly hot that day however, as it had been for the past month or so because of the dry season. We started talking about the weather and changes that he had observed in his lifetime. Having lived in the same area for most of his life, Jacob had built up what for me seemed like a never ending repertoire of stories about every rock and pebble in the region. He often shared anecdotes from his own life and how it was to grow up in the hamlet. The hamlet and municipal state where Jacob lived had only very recently become accessible by car, so for a very long time, the only transportation from one municipal state to the next was by boat -- depending on the weather. Life in general was dependent on understanding the system of environmental influences, as this guided all aspects of living in numerous ways such as food, travel, security, education, and so many more. So during our conversation on this particular morning, we touched on some of the changes he had noticed in his lifetime, but also the importance of the wind, the

difference between weather and climate, as well as its connection with traditional seasons in Palau.

Jacob: Since I started to work in the 60s I started to observe what was going on, but before that I didn't care about those things. I can see that in the 60s the weather was still following the system: what month and what month, same same same. I can notice that during summer time starting June, we go outside the reef and go across the reef, or across the channel because the weather was smooth. And also the fish were... there's a time when the fish is fatty and there's a time when they're not. So when it is fatty we usually go outside the reef. But I think in the 80s this fish that we like to catch is not fatty like in the 60s. Also, we cannot go across the reef. The current got kind of strong, so before we just go by raft, or swim, later by boat. And since then, it keep changing.

Long time ago when Palauan season we only had two seasons - dry and wet season. It is the wind travelling from one place to one place. So from November to April it's from East. Then from May to October, it is coming from the West coast, and then start again. That is why we call it easterly winds and westerly wind. Or dry season and wet season. So during easterly it is dry, and west is a lot of rain. They say one year is one change of the weather. I don't know how they figure out, those old Palauan.

CB¹³: Can you follow the wind like that today?

Jacob: Nowadays, let's say when I look at this and then I can look back to the 60s and we had regular system of the wind directions. But nowadays, now it should be easterly, but next day it already start from the west. Some people say that somewhere in Europe or America they spread this whole, they say 'the wind – it's only one that goes around' but when they bombed it, it split into smaller pieces and that's why it's differently all around. That is what I heard recently from Bureau of Weather. That before we had same system of routes of the winds, but after Typhoon Sally in the 60s, Americans tried to bomb the wind so it will gone, but instead of gone it has become many smaller pieces so they go all around. So that's why we don't have really regular route of winds that go around.

CB: Because the wind is a world wind?

Jacob: Yes, a world wind.

CB: I heard the wind can describe a change of a person's mood also?

Jacob: Yes, like if you went to party or dinner and act so happy so you enjoy much, you say "you have good wind" - *Ungil a cheltem* means your wind is good, you enjoy. The word for wind is *eolt*. *Cheltem* is possessive for wind.

CB: So the wind can actually be somebody's wind?

Jacob: Yes, when we say *eolt* then we mean just this wind, if the wind is coming in. But if you are enjoying we say *Ungil a cheltem* which means you are enjoying, you have good breeze, you enjoy.

¹³ Camilla Borrevik

CB: I heard that the suggestion for a Palauan name for climate change is "global winds of change".

Jacob: Yea, that could be because the route or the season of the wind is not like it was before. As regularly. 2-3 days later the direction of the winds has change. Like I say - before we always wish and hope that by June we will enjoy fishing outside, but now it's June and then the wind start here and the waves gets higher.

CB: Is there a Palauan word for climate? The difference between climate and weather?

Jacob: How would you differentiate in English weather and climate?

CB: I guess, weather is - today is sunny. Climate is longer period. Long-term weather.

Jacob: Ok, so. Weather would be *eanged* means "sky and heaven". Let's say, how is the weather? *Ng ua ngara a eanged?* You say "Oh very hot", and you can say "sky is blue". But heaven is something we don't know - where is heaven? Above the earth is heaven. Where the Christians say "heaven is where the god sleeps". *Eanged* can be these three: Weather, sky and heaven. It depends on the topics you are talking about.

And climate... Ehh.. [thinking for a long time] I think climate, we'll just say, maybe like two words: *blekerdelel e eanged*. It means the system of how the weather acts. When you say it's rainy season, then we say "It's rainy season" and then we talk about climate, it's in the season of the rain within six months. Then dry season. It's a season for hot weather and cold weather, dry and wet. So climate really isn't one word.

CB: It is more season or time?

Jacob: Time by time. If it changes then it is another season. We cannot call all this wet and dry season climate. Or, if we ask "What is the climate of Palau?" We say *Ua ngara a eanged e ra Belau?* Which means how is the weather of Palau.

CB: So how would you then translate climate change?

Jacob: [Thinking for several minutes before answering] It's quite long: *Omeldechel a blekerdelel a eanged*. *Omeldechel* will talk about the changes of the season or weather, something like that. It means changes, or the cause of changes. It's like something that caused a change. And that is exactly, I don't know the cause. The system, it change weather or something like that.

CB: How do I write down the translation?

Jacob: It's everyday weather, or everyday season. *Omeldechel* is from *eanged*. From the weather. So whatever aspects of this one [pointing at *Omeldechel*]. And this one [pointing at *eanged*] causes that change [in weather].

CB: And *blekerdelel* is connected to the word for weather?

Jacob: Yes, let's say, this [pointing at *blekerdelel*] is the part of this [pointing at *eanged*], like a part of the body. So *blekerdelel* is arm, all parts of this body. It's part of the same one whole thing. So when we look at the shape we know how does it look.

Jacob: See, when it comes to a person you say behaviour of person. Like how do you behave. In the weather there is how do the wind or the system weather behave in certain months or day or time.

CB: So it must be connected to a certain time.

Jacob: Yes.

CB: So you can't say just in general.

Jacob: Yes, cause in general we say there is a system of all the weather, and then when we break it down in this area, how the weather is like this and like this, in that area. If also there is a new moon, even though it is very hot but there is a little shower during the new moon. So they say "oh, there's a new moon's rain".

CB: So the rain is connected to the moon time.

Jacob: Yes.

CB: So these changes that are happening now —

Jacob: To us in Palau we don't really know. You from more civilised world, I always want to watch now channel 40. It's about science. They talk about the stars and I watch it. And there is also something about climate change. I like that when it is interesting.

The wind has historically been of particular importance to Palauans. The wind (*eólt*) determines the traditional Palauan year as mentioned by Jacob above: the easterly wind called *Klssel Ongos* is hot and dry, and the westerly wind called *Klssel a Ngebard* is rainy and strong. Different wind directions are what make up a traditional Palauan year, so when the wind direction changes after six months of either coming from the west or the east that marks the end of one year, called *rak*¹⁴, and the beginning of another. The wind is thus linked to seasons and times for planting and harvesting, as well as for fishing (see Johannes 1981).

Other Palauans have also told me how the wind may determine the personality of a child depending on the birth month. This being another example of the moving wind linking wind and personal traits, as Jacob also pointed out. Time reckoning connected to times of the wind is, according to Parmentier (1987:134-135), linked to how Palauans use movement as a link between space and time. This movement, most clearly exemplified as a wind that comes to different villages at certain times, is the foundation of areas of knowledge such as harvesting or fishing (Parmentier, 1987:135).

¹⁴ The name comes from the story about the journey of the God Rak who was responsible for the movement of the moon across all the villages of Palau.

The importance of regularities of winds is found elsewhere in the Pacific as well, as Hviding (1996) shows from the Marovo Lagoon in Solomon Islands. The closest term to ‘weather’ in the Marovo language is *are* meaning wind, and as in Palau the wind determines seasons as it comes in from different directions at different times because of the path of the trade winds (Hviding, 1996:52-53). Similar to the changes observed by Jacob, changes in the wind have been registered by Marovo people since the late 1980s (Hviding, 1996:372-374).

In Jacob’s explanations the wind becomes associated to change, a way to notice the changing “regular system of wind directions” as Jacob calls it. Jacob’s reflections about the wind was echoed by other interlocutors as well. “Nowadays”, another told me, “the wind only comes from one direction in Palau”. This has consequences for the mangrove and reefs because the wind and the ocean current normally cleans them, but with the change in direction of the wind, that was not the case anymore. Jacob notes that the wind is irregular nowadays, and that this has affected the regularity of the dry and wet seasons, as well as the quality of the fish. However, the reason for these changes are, according to Jacob, that the Europeans or Americans bombed the wind in the 1960s. This somewhat surprising thinking is something I will reflect on further in combination with the two other cases to explore what the reasoning for such rationale may be.

CASE 2: Climate change on artificial islands, Solomon Islands

Solomon Islands is a country in the Melanesian Pacific with a population of around 600.000. It is located further south-east from Palau, on a similar latitude as Papua New Guinea. Solomon Islands consists of six larger islands and around 900 small islands. The capital, Honiara, is located on the island of Guadalcanal. There are also nine other provinces in Solomon Islands each with their own provincial governments. While close to 80 percent of the population in Palau live near the main economic centre of Koror, a little over 10 percent of the population in Solomon Islands live in the capital Honiara. There are many other differences in addition to demographics, including the Solomon Islands being a constitutional monarchy and a patriarchal society, as opposed to the matrilineal system found in Palau.

During my nearly three months in Solomon Islands, I was involved in a project initiated by the Solomon Islands National Museum concerning artificial islets and anthropogenic islands. These small islands have been built by the inhabitants themselves and are found several places throughout Solomon Islands, many around the province Malaita. The aim of the project was to document ways of life and knowledge of the Langalanga Lagoon (*Wala* in Langalanga language) through collaborating with local fieldworkers. Langalanga lagoon lies on the west coast of the large island of Malaita. Malaita is the most populated province in Solomon Islands and makes up a total of 27 percent of the entire national population (Sulu et al. 2015:23). Around 16,500 *salt water people*, as they call themselves, live dispersed across the lagoon on coastal lands and artificial islets (Sulu et al., 2015). To get to the lagoon you require an outboard motor boat that takes you from Auki, the capital of Malaita, and head southwards. It does not take long before the first fully artificial island appears in the middle of the lagoon, surrounded by clear blue water and houses lying right at the shoreline.

I was told by the fieldworkers that Langalanga people have been living on these islands for the past 13-14 generations and according to oral history, the Langalanga people originally came from the nearby Kwara'ae and Kwaio areas (Guo 2011). The most prominent explanation is that they were forced to leave the mainland because of tribal warfare and started to build their own island in the lagoon (Guo 2014). They are well known for their production of shell money and their boat building skills which make up their main sources of income. Some islands are in the middle of the sea, while others are built in connection to an existing island or to a mangrove swamp close to the coast of the mainland. The houses are elevated by stilts and some have small patches of ground to walk on outside, while others are connected only through small elevated pathways built from coral rocks between each house, barely visible during high tide. Most villages have a small garden where they can grow some crops, but Langalanga people are largely depending on agricultural products and freshwater from the Malaita mainland (see Guo 2014). The Langalanga islands are, in other words, quite vulnerable to external impacts that may affect access to food and water, or total destruction of islands by heavy storms.

I quickly realised that climate change was far from an unknown term in Langalanga. On the first days after arriving in the lagoon, the museum staff and I set out by boat to visit one of the villages where a fieldworker lived. Just as we were approaching the village and turning our boat towards the mooring, he showed up standing on top of the stonewall with a big smile to greet us. As we finally reached where he was standing, he threw his hands in the air and said laughingly "*Hem climate change oraet!*" ("It truly is climate change") referring to the high sea level. The sea came up almost to a level where water was flooding the house situated at the edge of the wall. We went ashore and sat down outside his house where he lived with his wife and his two children. "We call them sailing ships," he said to me while pointing at a house. "When the sea gets too high, it looks like they will sail away!" he laughingly explained. Having a canoe was therefore very important, because without one "you are stuck".



Photo 1: Langalanga "sailing ships". A Langalanga house is within minutes fully surrounded by the sea, thereby not making it possible to move between the houses by foot.

I soon understood what he meant when we came back for another visit the following day and it started raining heavily while the tide came in. Within what felt

like minutes, the otherwise tall houses looked as if they indeed were floating and the ocean had swallowed the small pieces of swampland. I was amazed by how quickly the seascape changed and transformed the village. However, many other villages had also experienced the heavy rain and high tide, I learned. The next day we travelled to visit another fieldworker in a village closer to Auki. As soon as we picked her up and she jumped in the back of our car she started talking about the flooding that occurred the day before. She explained in detail how it had started raining during the tide and the ocean rose higher and higher. It was so fast, she said, that it flooded the whole village in one night. The water had even reached the very back of the village where floods normally did not extend, she said. She then paused for a moment, before ending her story by saying “Sea level rise”.

Awareness for the most vulnerable

According to the Solomon Islands National Adaptation Programme of Action, artificially built islands in Langalanga Lagoon are among “the most vulnerable to climate change and sea-level rise” in the entire country (NAPA, 2008:86). Part of this vulnerability is due to simply not being able to move away if their land is uninhabitable because they do not own land or have resources elsewhere (NAPA, 2008:85-86). The Pacific Climate Change Science Program (2013:206) notes that while the global sea level rise average is around 2.8–3.6 mm per year, the ocean around Solomon Islands has risen by around 8 mm per year since 1993. Comparing these calculations to the stories told of climate change and sea level rise by the fieldworkers seems to correlate, albeit here based on a quite general level of observation.

What struck me the most however, was how incorporated terms like climate change and sea level rise were as part of everyday discourse. I asked some of the fieldworkers where they had learned about climate change and sea level rise. They explained that organisations (the most recent at the time being World Fish) came to Langalanga Lagoon and told them about these things. I knew that there had recently been a group from World Fish in the area to work on a project about mangroves and held ‘training workshops’ for the Langalanga people. The aim of these workshops was to “raise awareness and understanding” and in effect ‘save the mangroves’ (World Fish 2015).

These kinds of workshops and ‘awareness raising’ projects are nothing new in the area. According to a report from United Nations, there were over 270 climate change-related initiatives in the Pacific Islands region already in 2009 divided between 15 countries (United Nations 2009). The number has since then risen drastically and the national Climate Change Office in Honiara is, as a result, struggling to get an overview of how many projects there are in Solomon Islands alone. The problem with this is also gaining an overview of just what information these projects and programmes are providing. In a meeting with the Climate Change Office in Honiara, I learned that there was even a dedicated person at the office whose sole job it was to try to get an overview of exactly how many similar projects there are in Solomon Islands. I was also provided with examples of incidents where the information about climate change given by some of the ‘awareness projects’ has been incorrect and therefore misinforming the people. In one incident, a textbook created in relation to a project for schoolchildren, stated that earthquakes and tsunamis were consequences of climate change. This is not only wrong, but it also created fear among the people when others, including the national Climate Change Office, came to speak about climate change.

Artificial islands in an anthropogenic world

The Langalanga Lagoon further presents an interesting case because of the Langalanga people’s existing concepts of anthropogenic environments. The islands found in the lagoon are differentiated by the Langalanga people by whether or not they are natural or made by humans. As was explained to me by the Langalanga fieldworkers, the islands are categorically divided into artificial, semi-artificial and natural islands depending on their construction. An island that has always been an island, what is considered a natural island, is called *kokomu*. An island that is considered fully artificial or man-made is *kokomu toela* meaning that this island has been built. Then there is also the category of semi-artificial islands that are called *kokomu* and the part that has been built would be referred to as *tolea*. The islands are further categorised as islands that are inhabited by people (*valuaua tolea*) or islands that have been abandoned (*faurara*) (Guo, 2014:3). This, according to Guo, relates to the emphasis of the Langalanga people on body movements and physical impacts on a particular island (2014:3). One may here draw similarities to the previous case from Palau where movement of the

wind becomes essential as link between space and time, as a foundation for knowing when to harvest or to go fishing. In the Langalanga case it is not the wind but people that move, and the people that impact their surroundings. Both are however reflections of epistemologies of environmental knowledge constructed around an understanding of their specific geographical surroundings.

For the Langalanga people, the concept of man-made or anthropogenic versus natural is as such part of a daily distinction or categorisation of living. There are dimensions of flexibility as well as fragility on these islands; one island gets abandoned, another one built, while others are destroyed. People physically move as one scenario demands a certain kind of flexibility (for example a cyclone), either in the form of relocation or reconstruction. These islands have their trajectories (being built, destroyed or lived on) embedded in the people's trajectories and vice versa. The anthropogenic aspect of life on an island is a foundational understanding of Langalanga way of life.

During the final workshop of the National Museum project, the fieldworkers worked in groups trying to document the environmental changes that people in Langalanga Lagoon had noticed. On a large piece of paper one group wrote down all of the different changes and then organised them into distinctive sections depending on what had changed and how. The four main categories that were recognised as affected by changes were: fish, coral, mangrove and garden areas. These were listed vertically in the middle of the sheet. We then discussed what was causing these changes and whether they were man-made or natural, a categorisation suggested by someone on the group. Under the category of man-made on the left side of the paper the following was listed: logging, mangroves for fuel and mud, fishing technique, and rock digging.

The group then moved on to listing the natural changes on the right side of the paper, but as I watched them writing the list I saw changes such as temperature rise, sea level rise, changing seasons and weather phenomena. Most of these are associated with effects of anthropogenic climate change and global warming and I therefore asked the group where they thought climate change should be added on the list. I quickly received a reply from an older male that climate change should be placed under the natural changes on the right side of the paper. When I asked why, he looked at me and

said “Yes, because it is natural. I mean, it can’t be like those” while pointing at the list of man-made impacts on the left side and shrugging his shoulders. A younger male from the group nodded in agreement and started writing down the changes thereby listed as “Natural and Climate Change”. The idea of humans being the source of change in the form of sea level rise or temperature rise did not resonate with the participants in the group exercise. The changes were therefore categorised on the paper as natural, together with climate change. Before providing some more reflection around this, I wish to move onto my third and final case.

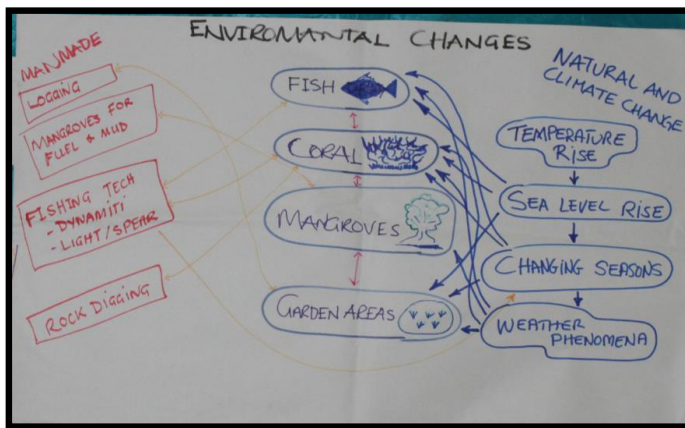


Photo 2: Natural climate change versus man-made changes. The result of the group exercise, explaining what changes were considered natural and what were considered man-made. Climate change here placed together with the natural changes.

CASE 3: “We started climate change” at COP21, Paris

The following case is a glimpse into one of the final days of COP21 in Paris, December 2015. It had already been close to three hectic weeks at the conference and the participants were all waiting for one of the very last drafts of the Paris Agreement. The draft was supposed to be released at 9 in the morning that day, but had, after continuous delays, been postponed until 9 in the evening. The switch between intense negotiations and what seemed like endless hours of waiting happened fast, and on this particular day as we were getting close to the end people were visibly both exhausted and excited. Many of the delegates attending the conference had only had a few hours of sleep every night trying to keep track of the meetings.

I was sitting in a room together with other delegates from different Pacific delegations waiting for a new draft of the text to be released. Sitting across two chairs, resting my head, I was listening to the conversations that went on around me. Just outside the room I could hear a few younger members of the British delegation who were passing time by playing cricket with an empty bottle and the cap. Their laughter and cheers could easily be heard inside the Palau room as all of the walls were made out of plywood and there were no roofs on any of the rooms that were all located in a large hall. Sitting right in front of me were two delegates from different Pacific Island delegations. They were sitting quietly, mostly concerned with chewing their betel nut, only interrupted now and again by quiet casual mumblings between them. After one of the delegates had finished one nut, he spat out the old nut in the bottle next to him and started digging for a new one in the plastic bag on his lap.

While prepping the next nut barely without watching - a sign of having done it countless times before - he turned towards the other delegate enthusiastically and burst out “We started climate change!”. She looked at him and paused before she started laughing and nodded her head in agreement. Overhearing this, I found it to be a peculiar statement, so I asked him what he had meant by saying that. He explained: “We were the ones who went to a climate meeting the first time – that was even before Copenhagen in 2009. We were only a few people there.” Then the other delegate continued: “We didn’t know what we were doing. We went around eating a lot of food”. They told me about how they had experienced the negotiations and how confusing it had all been and difficult to understand what was going on. There had been so many meetings and so many documents. She continued: “It feels unreal to have so few brackets in the text now” referring to the brackets that are used in the draft texts when the parties disagree on the wording. “I can’t believe we are so close!”.

In comparison, the text that was under negotiation in Copenhagen during COP15 had been full of brackets, a sign that few countries found a common consensus. Consensus is the dominant mode of decision-making at COPs, which is similar to many other international forums as well (see Telesca 2015). The Pacific delegates I talked to had found the whole meeting process difficult and unclear. In addition, they added, Denmark was cold and dark as it took place during an especially cold winter in

December of 2009. Yet, while talking about the Copenhagen conference and its difficulties, they also highlighted that this was the conference where several of the Pacific countries had really stood out for the first time. Many Pacific countries had been active in giving interviews to the international media, particularly Kiribati and Tuvalu. One of the delegates told me how the island nations of Kiribati and Tuvalu used to be the combined “poster child” for climate change, but that in the past few years the Marshall Islands had also become increasingly active and outspoken, shortly followed by a number of other island countries. “All thanks to Minister deBrum”, one of the delegates said. Tony deBrum was then the Foreign Minister of Marshall Islands.

This final ethnographic case reflects a different story of climate change where it is not portrayed as a physical phenomenon at all, but rather as something along the lines of a skill that has to be learned and mastered. The skill is first and foremost the mode of decision-making, or, as Altman and Shore (2014:337) more crudely put it, “the elitist, Machiavellian inter-governmental practices of traditional (‘Westphalian’) diplomacy”. Saying that “*We started climate change*” is telling of how Pacific countries have had to learn how to ‘do climate change’ in this regard. In this case, the setting takes place at a COP where what to be learned is thereby tied to the procedures of the conference, such as the meetings, the actors, the negotiations, and last but not least, the politics including forms of diplomacy. As mentioned in Chapter 1, Pacific engagements at the COP meetings have been challenging for many of these countries due to financial constraints and small delegation sizes. Many atoll nations have been relatively outspoken at these meetings for many years, and according to Barnett and Campbell (original emphasis, 2010:87-90), Tuvalu emerged as a “climate change *cause célèbre*” in 1990 when Former Prime Minister, Bikenibeu Paeniu held a speech at the Second World Climate Conference. The Prime Minister highlighted in particular the vulnerability of living on a small island and the feeling of injustice because of it. After that, the international media started writing more about the low-lying islands in the Pacific. When the UNFCCC was signed a few years later in 1992, the vulnerability of small island countries was recognised in the preamble text of the Convention.

However, Pacific countries have struggled with being sufficiently heard in negotiations to a level that reflects their experience of environmental impacts. The main

reason for this is the complicated and grand format of climate negotiation conferences that makes it particularly difficult for Pacific countries and other island states: “Keeping abreast of the development emerging from all these meetings is a challenge for even the developed countries, and for most SIDS it is impossible”, Barnett and Campbell (2010:89) therefore argue.

Although *Party Groups* such as The Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS) has helped in furthering a stronger and more collective voice of island countries who face similar challenges, involvement in the UNFCCC agenda has been a long learning process because of the institutional complexities. *Party Groupings* are groups of countries who support the same substantive interests and positions. Developing countries work through the Group of 77, which despite the name is a group consisting of 133 countries and China. This makes it the largest country block at negotiations, which sometimes may be challenging because of the many different Party positions represented within. That is why many of the members of G77+China are part of other groupings as well, such as Least Developed Countries (LDCs), the African Group, and the Alliance of Small Island Developing States (AOSIS).

These groups all have lead negotiators who represent and negotiate on the group’s behalf. Other important groups include the European Union (EU), which consists of its 28 member countries, the Umbrella Group which is a coalition of non-EU developed countries such as Australia, Canada, Japan, New Zealand, Kazakhstan, Norway, the Russian Federation, Ukraine and the US, the Environmental Integrity Group (EIG), the Arab Group, the African Group, and several more.¹⁵ The party groupings’ positions are formed through negotiations in closed meetings only open to their members, where all member parties can express their positions and through these discussions, find common position on various issues. In recent years, the Pacific Small Islands Developing States (PSIDS) group have also held their own meetings, but the group does not hold official negotiation status. Therefore, if Pacific countries want their positions heard, they must go through the other groups such as AOSIS or LDCs, then G77+China. However, some countries, like Palau, are not part of the G77+China group,

¹⁵ The UNFCCC website provides a full overview of all the Party Groupings that are represented at the climate change negotiations, available at <https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/parties-non-party-stakeholders/parties/party-groupings>.

which makes position-making within AOSIS even more important.

Reflections: Significances of ethnographic complexities

Climate change is far from a straightforward issue and all of these cases reveal certain confounding aspects. As exemplified through the above cases, for Pacific Islanders this applies to multiple areas of life, ranging from day to day conversations all the way to the scene of world politics. Before an attempt to collate a conclusion of sorts based on all of the three cases, I wish to reflect on some of the insights each of these ethnographic examples may provide.

In the first case, Jacob is asked to explain changes that he has observed in recent decades and to provide translations of concepts such as weather, climate, and climate change. What does this dialogue show?

The first matter I want to highlight relates to that of translating ‘climate change’ into a different vernacular language. Palau has two official languages: Palauan (or *belauan*) and English.¹⁶ Both are widely used in everyday conversation, in official documents (although most of these are in English) and speeches, as well as in newspapers, TV or radio. I spoke English with all my interlocutors although I attempted to learn some Palauan and would often ask for a Palauan translation and spelling.¹⁷ In our conversation, Jacob tried to translate climate and used the words *blekerdelel e eanged* as a translation. *Blekerdelel* means behaviour or personality and is normally used to describe the character of a person or animal. When talking about objects such as trees, ocean, wind, sky or clouds, Palauans would rather use the word *deruchelel* which means ‘condition’. However, as it was explained to me, if the condition of the environment is strange, one may use *blekerdelel* to explain this behaviour of the weather or sky (*eanged*). After having heard my explanation of climate as “long-term

¹⁶ Palauan is an Austronesian language and belongs to the Western Malayo-Polynesian family group. Together with Chamorro (the language spoken in Guam) Palauan belongs to a different Austronesian language group from that of the other Oceanic languages in Micronesia. The Palauan language also contains words from Spanish, Japanese and English, a result of past colonial influence.

¹⁷ The Palauan spelling of many of my interlocutors differed when asked to spell the same words, it also often differed from the spelling in the official Palauan dictionary. The Palauan alphabet was first developed in the 1970s and the different forms of spelling by my interlocutors may be a result of varying degree of being taught the written language in school or elsewhere growing up.

weather”, Jacob found the right translation to be “the system of how the weather acts”. This he further explained by relating it to seasons.

Jacob’s translation of climate change, however, was not directly translated to global winds of change but rather a change in seasons or weather. There was no official translation when I was in Palau and translations differed. Some of the suggestions I heard: *Mengedengodech el iolt* (can be translated to ‘changing winds’), or *Mengedengodch* (or *Ngodecheng*) *el eltel a Belulchad* (translated as ‘changing world wind’). Some also pointed out that relating it only to wind was wrong as it should also include ocean. In daily conversations, most people used the English term ‘climate change’ even when talking in Palauan. When I mentioned the translation I had heard for climate change as ‘changing of global winds’, Jacob however agreed to this and related it to the changes in the wind he himself had experienced.

Rudiak-Gould (2012) shows through his research from the Marshall Islands that the translation from scientific language concerned with climate change to vernacular language can be complicated and may involve a change of meaning. He shows through the translation of the Marshallese word for climate, *mejatoto*, that a process of ‘promiscuous corroboration’ takes place (Rudiak-Gould 2012:50). The Marshallese word *mejatoto* does not only mean weather, but it also includes the wider cosmos as it exists for the Marshallese. Rudiak-Gould thereby shows how some words used to describe climate also have social and cultural aspects embedded. He therefore makes the point that such translations often involves the entire social sphere, which in turn opens up for other interpretations of what may be considered climate change in Western interpretations (Rudiak-Gould, 2012:50). A reason for this may be tied to perceptions of nature and culture, as Rudiak-Gould points out, and is, in the Marshall Islands, “indicative of a deeper translational difficulty between Marshallese and Western worldview” (2012:50). What can appear as ‘mistranslation’ is rather than reinterpretation of climate change as a simultaneously sociocultural/environmental issue, using human behaviours to describe environments (Rudiak-Gould, 2012:52).

The difficulties in translating ‘climate’ can, according to Rudiak-Gould, also be indicative of difficulties understanding meteorological or geophysical aspects of climate change (Rudiak-Gould 2012). Relating this to my conversation with Jacob, he

interestingly enough associated changes in the wind with Europeans or Americans who had bombed the wind in the 1960s. The explanation seems to correlate with nuclear testings that took place in the 50s and 60s across the Pacific region.¹⁸ Rather than going into a discussion of whether such reasoning is right or wrong, it can provide a great example of how knowledge is incorporated into existing ‘trajectory narratives’ as described earlier. This means that as part of the reasoning for the changes in the wind, Jacob is applying existing narratives of environmental impact, here probably influenced by the nuclear testings, to explain a current phenomenon. This brings me to both the second and third point that I wish to make from Jacob’s explanations, which is first, that knowledge moves, travels and intertwines, and second, that Jacob’s well-founded insights into the system of environmental influences build on decades of experience, observation and understanding. This highly localised and detailed place-based knowledge about the area is therefore, I argue, to be considered immensely important when trying to understand climate change impacts.

Anthropologists have shown how climate change knowledge moves from scientific to vernaculars (see Rudiak-Gould 2011; 2012), and how local understandings can enrich scientific environmental knowledge (for example Lahsen 2010; Fogel 2004; Crate and Nuttall 2009). Climate change knowledge is unremittingly going through a contextualisation in historical, social and vernacular terms, as Jacob’s case illustrates. Hastrup (2016) frames this as the assembling of climate knowledge and underlines that such knowledges can be constructed in multiple ways. Measuring impacts of climate change are not just a matter of scientific calculations or “civilised countries” as somewhat ironically said by Jacob, and local understandings have to be taken seriously. Heather Lazrus states that if taken seriously, it may lead to a greater sense of local agency (2009:241). Jacob’s story about changing winds is not just a witness account of meteorological changes, it is an insight into how living with climate change affects, in often unexpected ways, the entirety of a society from language, fishing and traditional perspectives of time.

¹⁸ See The International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) at <http://www.icanw.org/the-facts/the-nuclear-age/> for a complete overview of nuclear bombings that occurred in the Pacific region.

The translations Jacob make provide insights into ways in which climate change is understood. Furthermore, these insights can influence how, why and what is considered a sign of climate change. Continuing then to my last point, it enriches comprehension of local forms of knowledge, described here by Julie Cruikshank in relation to the many knowledges associated with glaciers in North-western America: “Local knowledge in northern narratives is about *unique entanglements* of culture and nature, humans and landscapes, objects and their makers” (my emphasis, 2005:259). People are seeing changes in their daily lives, and are, as highlighted by Kirsten Hastrup (2016) in her analysis of climate knowledge, increasingly contributing these changes to climate change as part of these unique entanglements. Hastrup has previously warned however, about perceiving local or indigenous knowledge as static when discussing its relation with “new weather realities”, because “right now there is an unwarranted (and unproductive) epistemological closure around local knowledge as inherently traditional and stable, quite apart from its being inherently more valuable than other kinds of knowledge” (Hastrup 2013a:276). Quite to the contrary, knowledge moves through spaces and is continuously interpreted and reinterpreted, bringing us back to the point above. With that, it also brings us to the second case and the Langalanga people.

The Langalanga Lagoon case from Solomon Islands shows how climate change, in various forms, both as discourse and a physical reality, is very much present in people’s everyday lives. Living in Langalanga is living with catastrophic cyclones that destroy entire islands, in addition to slow changes like a rising sea. Scientifically registered sea level rise in the area rightly reflects local experiences as water is noticeably higher than before. Cruikshank (2001:390) claims that one may take such comparative approaches to scientific expertise and local knowledge to learn about climate change impacts. The combination of science and place-based experiences is valuable, she argues, because “our human ability to come to terms with global environmental problems will depend as much on human values as on scientific expertise”. She critiques what often is seen as a divide between science and local knowledge, and points to two contradicting perspectives. From a scientific perspective local knowledge may be seen as something vague and context-dependent or as

something that is tied into social relations such as kinship. But similarly, Cruikshank also argues, many people may look at science the same way; as something vague and context-dependent, and as part of other social institutions such as for example universities (2001:390).

Sharing Cruikshank's critique, I would also argue that the Langalanga case is far from vague as it presents concrete examples of what it means to live with climate change, both as discourse and as a physical phenomenon. The Langalanga case example furthermore reflects two different aspects of how to obtain knowledge about climate change; firstly that of receiving information from awareness projects, and secondly, that of lived or embodied experience. Starting with the first, it is necessary to make the point that regional awareness projects in the Pacific are extrusive in their knowledge-sharing practices, and shape much of available information about climate change in the Pacific region. Ideas about climate change are consequently often influenced by such interactions with projects or similar initiatives. One view of this is certainly the concurrent Foucauldian power influence that may be embedded in such information work, as discussed further in Chapter 5. But another aspect of this, is that awareness projects may also shape people's ideas about what is recognisable as climate change. I wish to highlight this point about 'recognisable climate change' in particular as it is important for the further analysis in coming chapters: by being able to 'recognise' or 'see' climate change, through for example flooding or similar and connect it to sea level rise as a reason, it also provides people with concrete stories about climate change. In that sense, the informational work by awareness projects is also part of what actuates people with recognising experiences of climate change. My reason for pointing this out is that these stories may continue to be spread, move and travel in order to raise awareness for others (for example at negotiations).

Moving on to the second aspect, the lived experience for Langalanga people as shown in the case study is also important for obtaining knowledge about climate change. This can draw us towards phenomenological approaches of anthropology, in order to explain how humans gain knowledge through perception and embodied experiences. Tim Ingold's (2000) contribution in this area should not go unmentioned, as his concept of 'dwelling' may help analyse important connections between humans

and their environments. Through his “dwelling perspective” (2000:5), Ingold makes the point that everyday experiences and embodied movements are important dimensions to how human beings understand and perceive the world. Phenomenological approaches can therefore be useful to explore further such human/non-human relations and the emergence of this knowledge, although that is beyond my aim here. My purpose instead is to illuminate the importance of knowledge that is place-based and empirically experienced first-hand, as explained in Chapter 2 and as I will explore more in-depth in the next chapter.

As described by Marino and Schweitzer (2016:204), this knowledge is complex, build over time in a persons’ life, and very different from other climate knowledges:

epistemologies of environmental knowledge are frequently built around understanding a complex system of environmental influences occurring within a specific geographical space [...] epistemologies of environmental knowledge are also especially dependent on personal experience [...] which is an experience markedly different from climate modelling, for example, and which often entails, generalizable, and impersonal analysis.

Adding to this, from a Pacific studies standpoint, is the strong connection between people and place as explained in the previous chapter. A person, as described by Cristina Toren (1995:164) concerning Fijian culture, is a material manifestation of place: “People are the land’s very substance”. In this sense the generalised Pacific person is an embodiment of place, and this includes, also as argued by Toren (1995:163), changes that occur there over time.

Furthermore, the things that people perceive and recognise as climate change and observe as changes, be it flooding in Langalanga or a Fijian village, play an important role. Scientists make climate change ‘visible’ through their graphs and symbols, according to Hulme (2009a:238). Pacific Islanders are similarly ‘making others see’ through stories about the changes. The signs of climate change talked about in Langalanga provide the stories that tell us something about life that has been, perhaps is no more, and life that is now (by extension, potentially life that will be). In that sense, they become similar to signs *in* and *of* history as discussed by Parmentier (1987) for Palau. Similarly, as Parmentier also pointed out, stories have normative value drawing on experiences of living and of life. Science, on the other hand, does not provide this perspective. Observations of changes concerning the growth, behaviour and so on, of

a mango tree or a crab, may be seen as metonyms for climate change. Such fine-tuned empirical observations also build locally place-based stories, yet bear potential beyond their immediate derivation.

Now, a final analysis regarding the Langalanga case is in order. And for that I turn to the response that climate change is natural and not man-made. Therefore, before I move on to the final case from COP21, I want to briefly provide three related reasons as to why the group decided that climate change was natural. Yet, I do need to add that this perspective does not necessarily represent the opinions of the entire group.

The terms climate change and sea level rise were widely known and actively used in everyday talk, as my earlier trips to Langalanga Lagoon exemplified. One reason for this may be that climate change has become a new “buzzword” (Barnes et al, 2013:543) through the increasing amount of climate change awareness projects. This may, Hulme warns, lead to the danger of reducing everything to the explanation of climate change and what he calls “climate reductionism” (2011:247). There is as such the danger that ‘everything’ then becomes a sign of climate change. When ‘everything’ becomes climate change, one could also raise questions regarding the extent of this incorporation into existing epistemologies and cosmologies. In that regard, Marino and Schweitzer (2009) argue that using the term climate change may be unfavourable in places where local knowledge is already based on intricate entanglements between environmental systems and social histories. If the word *climate* is difficult to translate into vernacular languages, as in Palauan or Marshallese, such terms may not even be useful in many settings (see Barnes 2015).

Yet climate change awareness projects and others continue to use these terms to explain changes. That is why there is a need to listen to how climate change is made meaningful in a broad range of settings, across scales and levels. The signs of climate change conveyed through stories are not simply a recognition of change as such, or a testimony of the physical reality of climate change in a closed field (of the anthropologist). They also provide insights into how humans live in the world and create their own perceptions about their surroundings. It is not simply local nor relative, but rather “as much of a grand theory as anything” (Hastrup, 2013b:161) meaning that even small stories in that regard are important insights. Understanding the concept of

anthropogenic changes in Langalanga could in principle be rather understandable as categories of man-made versus natural are used daily and as part of life. In addition to this, the idea that humans may interfere with the weather is also found in historical Langalanga traditions of having powerful priests (*Fata 'abu*) who could control the weather. Yet for the group that participated in the project exercise, climate change was considered natural. Perhaps it was because climate change is seen as part of a Western ideology deriving from awareness projects or elsewhere, which epistemologically or categorically fits into another frame or scale of understanding, yet this would be a speculation.

A final point I wish to make as a possibility to why climate change was categorised as natural is that climate sceptics exist everywhere. Many people are *not* concerned about climate change, as Jessica Barnes (2015) shows for Egyptian farmers. These Egyptian farmers are, however, concerned about changes in the water supply, but do not consider this linked to climatic changes (Barnes, 2015:141). It is, in other words, not a given that all people (even those in Langalanga lagoon labelled as 'most vulnerable' to climate change) are concerned about climate change the way others might expect them to be. A similar argument and a final example is provided by Karsten Paerregaard (2016) for the Andean people. They differentiate between ways of human interaction with the environment: "Although changes in the environment indirectly can be related to human behaviour – for example, when humans neglect to make offerings to the nonhuman beings – ultimately, it is these forces and not humans who control nature and therefore cause environmental change" (2016:259). The idea that human activity has caused climate change is therefore met with scepticism, Paerregaard argues, because humans are only "one among many living agents in the world" (2016:259). My point is this: scepticism can take many different forms - even whilst recognising signs of climate change just outside your front door.

It is time then to provide some reflections on the final case from COP21 in Paris where climate change is faced more as an institutionalised system that values what in Weberian terms is effective bureaucracy through protocol, hierarchy and rules. COPs are examples of supranational bureaucracy and a "zone of high modernity" (Telescar, 2015:50). It is thus following similar frameworks as other development processes and

environmentalism, in particular the characterisation of country dichotomies, drawing on frameworks of capitalism and neoliberalism. Categorisation of countries such as rich/poor or developed/developing are as such prevalent, as well as measuring a country's *capacity*. Differing views on having *capacity* have been fundamental to discussions where on one hand Pacific countries need to develop it in some form, but often, as Barnett and Campbell (2010:93) show, the concept of *capacity* is also associated with learning to comply with the procedures of international climate institutions.

These procedures include particular ways of doing things, following certain protocol of interaction, communication, as well as even physical appearance. The COP conference and the negotiations can be seen as standardised social forms that “illustrate organisational processes” trying to “resolve forms of complexity” on particular issues (Brown, Reed and Yarrow, 2017:21-22). In Chapter 7 I will explore particular climate change issues that are important for Pacific countries in this regard. In this chapter, I focus on how such protocol relates to the intriguing statement that “We started climate change”. For that, I wish to turn to a description by Hannah Brown, Adam Reed and Thomas Yarrow (2017:23) in their analysis of meeting procedures:

Meetings are often attempts to tame, narrow, and contain uncertainty [...]. Meetings are spaces where practices are formalized and forms are practised, through performances that participate in, even as they reconfigure and extend, organizational imaginations. Still, [...] procedures of partly indeterminate form are spaces of negotiation and transformation of various kinds.

Ironically, the purpose of meetings and procedures is, as Brown, Reed and Yarrow (2017) point out, to ‘tame uncertainty’ through a generalised form of practice. Yet, when the Pacific delegate in the case was to explain what he had meant by his statement, it was meant as a referral to a time when they “didn’t know what they were doing”. It shows how ‘forms’ and ‘performances’, as mentioned in the quote above, has to be learned over time. I would therefore argue that this in itself is constituting a sort of ‘COP vernacular’ with its own tradition of knowledge that, in order to fully participate in the meetings, therefore must be learned and mastered over time.

This is not always easy for Pacific delegations as they sometimes face certain challenges connected to participation. In analysing the institutional forces and rhetoric

behind environmental campaigns in Malaysia, Peter Brosius (1999:50) explains how similar institutions such as United Nations Environment (UNEP) or IPCC may limit the involvement of some actors: “Institutions are both enabling and limiting. Defining themselves as filling particular spaces of discourse and praxis, they in effect define (or redefine) the space of action; they privilege some forms of action and limit others; they create spaces for some actors and dissolve spaces for others”. The spaces for expressing opinions are similarly limited for Pacific delegations at COPs, as they must come in the form of correct protocol through negotiating country groupings such as AOSIS or G77 + China.

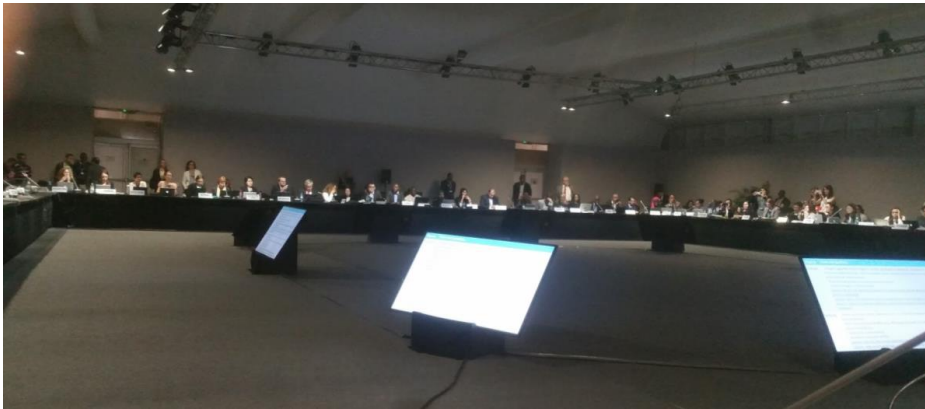


Photo 3: Delegates gathered to negotiate text during COP22. Sitting in a large square, country negotiators discuss what words to include in a text. The large screens in the middle of the room show the text and is edited by the Chairs of the meeting while negotiating.

Furthermore, if some actors, or as in this case, delegations, do not have *capacity* to fully participate on equal terms, the institutionalised processes instead create new forms of social inequality – even within the space of a COP. Because of the challenges faced by Pacific delegations (relating to institutional capacity and bureaucratic procedures) other spaces are therefore sought out in order to influence discussions about climate change. This work, I argue, is part of developing a Pacific climate diplomacy.

That leads me back to the statement “We started climate change”: It reflects not only challenges in learning processes or protocol, it also entails an embedded sense of agency. This agency, I claim, is connected to the Pacific climate diplomacy that has

developed in recent years (Fry and Tarte 2015). As will be elaborated on through the following chapters, Pacific climate diplomacy is characterised by a conversion of Pacific climate change stories into the realm of global climate governance. The stories of climate change as expressed by Pacific delegates in different forms, carry the authority of lived experiences of climate change in its multifaceted ways and represent as such its own authenticity in a COP setting. In many Pacific Islands, stories are knowledge, and sharing knowledge is a powerful act that incorporates actors into knowledge systems that symbolises a sense of connectedness. Stories thus create relations and of having a sense of belonging into a relation.

Relating this to international diplomacy, Pacific delegates have shaped a Pacific climate diplomacy drawing on these Pacific social and cultural configurations. This is perhaps most clearly exemplified through the Talanoa Dialogue which is now a formal speaking forum at UNFCCC meetings. Briefly explained, a *talanoa* is a Pacific form of oral communication between people and it “means ‘to talk’, ‘discuss’, ‘converse’, ‘tell stories’” (Tunufa’i, 2016:229). The purpose of the Talanoa Dialogue as part of the UNFCCC meeting process, is therefore

to share stories, build empathy and to make wise decisions for the collective good. The process of Talanoa involves the sharing of ideas, skills and experience through storytelling. During the process, participants build trust and advance knowledge through empathy and understanding. (United Nations Climate Change 2018)

Based on this Pacific idea of interaction, the Talanoa Dialogue was incorporated into the UNFCCC meetings after Fiji served as the Presidency for COP23. Communication through stories represent a Pacific approach as an alternative to the UN bureaucracy.

This alternative brings me to a final point I would like make in this regard, connected to the Talanoa Dialogue description that concerns “advance[ing] knowledge through empathy and understanding”. In contrast to existing forms of meeting procedures at COP, the Talanoa Dialogue opens up for sharing emotions and “ideas, skills and experience through storytelling”. First, this could as such be an example of what Brown, Reed and Yarrow (2017:23) previously referred to as “procedures of partly indeterminate form” as they provide “spaces of negotiation and transformation of various kinds”. Pacific delegates, and in this example the Fijian delegation in particular through the COP Presidency, thus took use of such “indeterminate form” and

‘transformed’ a part of the UNFCCC procedure into Pacific form. That would require having the knowledge about where to find such spaces and how to make use of it.

Second, the Talanoa Dialogue provides an opportunity for Pacific delegates to share their own experiences of climate change as a lived reality in the islands. With the delegates that travel and move come embedded experiences of living with climate change, founded on the propinquity between place and the Pacific person. Pacific delegations and diplomats are not only the “symbolic and physical embodiment” (Altman & Shore, 2014:430) of their countries, but they are also bearers of Pacific place-based and localised knowledge and understanding of climate change.

Drawing the cases together

I wish to give some final comments on insights provided in this chapter. Discourses and knowledges are powerful in shaping people’s perceptions and understandings of a complicated issue. In major public discourse, climate change in Pacific countries has often been framed within a narrative of crisis and catastrophe through media coverage that favour a dramatic take on impacts. Through such framings, there is the danger that Pacific islanders are portrayed as weak or as victims. The danger of this, as highlighted by Marino and Schweitzer (2016) and Lazrus and Farbotko (2012), is that such a delineation influences how others may think of these places in a restricting way. That is also why it is important for Pacific people themselves to influence what and how they are presented in global narratives. But that means that Pacific islanders must recognise the power of their local stories in order to ‘localise’ an otherwise limited place-based discourse, strongly influenced by science.

Prominent discourses on climate change have, as shown, been influenced by ideas of a global scientific climate and attempts to localize climate change have been difficult. In climate science, localizing means “the process of downscaling from global climate models [...] in specific places” (Krauss, 2009:149). At the smaller scale of everyday lives, it is however much more difficult for climate science to make predictions (Barnes and Dove, 2015:10). Similar tendencies are found in the area of climate politics, an area Ulrich Beck (2010) has argued to be an elitist and expert one, which also heavily relies on science as truth (see for example Jasanoff and Wynne

1998; Jasanoff 2004; Lahsen 2010; De Marchi 2014) and favours bureaucratic procedures (see Telesca 2015; Orlove et al 2015). Political strategies have often tried to influence public perceptions, and by using “the lens of climate change” as part of the explanation it gains a lot of public attention (Mathur, 2015:106). Climate change as an idea thus has great ‘versatility’ (Hulme, 2015:297) and the ideational dimension of imagining climate change is quite powerful (Mathews 2015; Barnes and Dove 2015).

There are therefore, as Orlove et al (2015) points out, several advantages to adopting a more place-based discourse that opens up for localised knowledge about current changes. Orlove et al argues that a place-based focus is vital for increased participation in international negotiations by indigenous peoples, a point most relevant here. Hulme (2010a:267) underlines the versatility of climate change and says climate change may be “a resourceful idea and a versatile explanation which can be moulded and mobilised”. I connect this to the growing participation of Pacific delegates in recent years by taking on larger roles in international climate negotiations. With these delegates come the embedded experiences of living with climate change in the Pacific. It provides fruitful ground for exploring how such ‘moulding and mobilising’ taking place through Pacific climate change stories are incorporated into the realm of global discourse and politics. This, as both a global political production of a local reality, and as what may also appear as an alternative to scientific explanations. COP is then an interesting site where local stories may reach global discourse. It is a gathering of people from around the world, a place where decisions can be influenced, and an important event for the world media. COPs therefore provide an opportunity for Pacific stories to gain a world-wide reach.

These Pacific efforts illustrate the shaping of a form of climate change knowledge that further provides a foundation for greater understanding of climate change as experienced and understood in the wider Pacific, beyond the particular region. And as the three cases have shown, climate change is not a straightforward issue on any level and may provide contradictory, difficult and even surprising insights. What it means to live with climate change - in its discursive, political, environmental and many other forms – is perhaps the most important question to answer if indeed we

are finding ourselves in an age and time when human life drastically alters all non-human life as well.

In the next chapter, I will explore further how climate change has entered the lives of people living in one Pacific country in particular. Through a closer examination of Palau's history, sociality and cultural configurations, I show how Palauans may draw upon these to establish a sense of international leadership within the field of climate change and sustainable development.

Chapter 4

“Our turn to lead”: Palau

Introduction

While the previous chapters have drawn on insights gained from multiple locations and provided the theoretical and methodological framework, this is the first of two chapters more empirically focused on one particular Pacific Island nation. In this chapter, I turn my attention to national decision-making and position-making in Palau in order to illustrate how some Pacific countries are taking international leadership roles within areas of conservation and climate action. In 2015, Palau started a nationwide campaign to get a Marine Sanctuary Act approved by the Palauan people and the government. The quote in the title of this chapter is from one of the campaigning events, a premiere screening of a National Geographic movie about Palau, where the President of Palau, Tommy Remengesau Jr., declared for the audience that it was “Our turn to lead. Lead by example”. Consequently, the questions this chapter seeks to explore are: What does it mean for Palauans to “lead by example”? And what does “our turn to lead” imply?

I argue that we must explore historical and present-day dimensions of Palau and other Pacific societies to understand how such a small country can have an inverted proportional international presence. I aim to show that past and present political processes in Palau have in many ways formed a foundation for the country’s current enlarged profile on the global climate and environmental scene. Palau is an excellent example because the country provides “a striking microcosm of some of the economic, cultural, social, and political dynamics that increasingly characterize the contemporary era in the Pacific and elsewhere”, as phrased by Terence Wesley-Smith (2000:307). Pacific Islands are far from “isolated dots” (Hau’ofa, 1994:153), but rather, as Wesley-Smith (200:307) further argues, they are “entangled in a broad web of economic, social, and cultural forces”. Nor are Pacific islanders ‘silent recipients’ of climate change impacts, but they are, as this chapter will show through the case study of Palau, also making use of climate change as a ‘vocalising tool’ (Lazrus and Farbotko, 2012). This

is shown through national initiatives like the Marine Sanctuary that set concrete ambitious examples of large-scale national sustainable solutions to a global problem and thereby “lead by example”. Yet, it is not always without complications and may bring about ‘clashes’ (Eriksen 2016) between levels and scales.

Importantly, this chapter also explores social and cultural characteristics that may help explain some of the features within a Pacific climate diplomacy, in order to provide a wider sense of empirical foundation. These characteristics include stories as knowledge, distinctive relational aspects of Pacific society, and the importance of these two in a configuration of the Pacific person. I start by presenting the country of Palau and the people.

Pristine Paradise? The story of Palau

Pristine Paradise. Stop there and imagine what it really means, and how beautiful it might look. Then pamper your eyes on speckles of emerald green mushrooms floating on a seemingly infinite cobalt sea. Then say “Palau” out loud, and see just how many people know that this island country exists. Better yet, say “Pristine Paradise. Palau”, and wonder what makes it so special. I’ll tell you the secret – it’s the people and their culture (Kloulechad 2015).

If imagining Paradise as being green and lush surrounded by crystal clear waters in all shades of blue, Palau fits the bill. Located 7 degrees above the Equator, the tropical country sees little seasonal variation in temperatures throughout the year with an average of around 30 degrees Celsius. Palau is the western-most island group in the Pacific Ocean at 7 degrees North and 134 degrees east, and is part of the subregions of Micronesia and the Caroline Islands. Palau consists of one main archipelago and several smaller islands, in total more than 300 islands. The high islands of Palau are in terms of land mass the largest in Micronesia. The largest island within the archipelago is Babeldaob (*Babelthuap*), which is a volcanic island of 332km² making up 80 percent of the country’s total land area. The highest point of Palau is also found here; Mount Ngerchelchuus, 242 meters above sea level. The interior of Babeldaob consists of mountains, hills and valleys with savannahs and dense forests. Babeldaob is home to 10 out of the total 16 municipal states. North of Babeldaob lies the atoll Kayangel State, and in the southwest are the states of Koror, Peleliu, Angaur, Sonsorol, and Hatohobei. Palau’s many islands are of different geological formations such as volcanic, reef, atoll,

low platform and high limestone (Olsudong, Emesiochel and Mersai 1997).

Almost 80 percent of Palau's approximately 20,000 people live in the main economic centre of Koror. The Capitol and the seat of government are, however, located about 20km away at Ngerulmud in Melekeok State. It was moved there in 2006 after several years of trying to relocate from Koror in an attempt to repopulate Babeldaob (Leidemann 2006). This attempt was also furthered by the building of the Compact Road that started in 1994 and finished in 2007. The compact road now encircles the whole of Babeldaob and connects the large island with the southern state of Koror. Nevertheless, the majority of Palauans still live in the greater Koror area and nearby states. South of Koror are the world famous and UNESCO World Heritage listed Rock Islands, which are part of the Ngederrak Conservation Area.



Photo 4: The Rock Islands in Ngederrak Conservation Area.

These elevated limestone islands are uplifted and eroded ancient reefs which lie plentiful across the sea between Koror and Peleliu. They are mostly uninhabited, but are frequently visited by Palauans and tourists for picnics and day trips. Palau is known for its extraordinary marine diversity and is a highly popular destination for divers, snorkelers and sports fishers from around the world. Palau is northeast of the Coral Triangle that lies between Indonesia, Philippines, Papua New Guinea, Malaysia, and

Solomon Islands, known for having the highest diversity of shallow-water and coral reef marine species in the world (Colin, 2009:2). The marine environment is of great importance for Palau, both as a source of income through tourism and fishing, as well as in Palauans' day-to-day lives. Although the number of fulltime fishermen has declined in recent decades, many Palauans still spend a lot of time fishing either for their own consumption or to sell.

Palau rose from the sea about 20 to 30 million years ago when the Kyushu–Palau Ridge started moving and volcanic mass created the islands. 20.000 years ago when the sea level was 120 meters below that of today, Palau looked quite different. The outer reefs were dry land, creating an island three times larger than today (Colin, 2009:13). There is also a legend of how Palau came to be during a time when there were demigods. Born out of a giant clam, a creature called Latmikaik that resembled a shrimp was born in the area between where the islands of Angaur and Peleliu are today. Latmikaik gave birth to three children, one of whom was called Chuab.¹⁹ She had an enormous appetite and kept growing and growing. Chuab demanded to be fed so much that the villagers' own food became scarce. They therefore decided that they could no longer feed Chuab and would have to kill her in a fire. As Chuab's giant body burned, she fell, and her body exploded into the many different pieces that now are the islands of Palau.

Myths like this are important across the Pacific and according to Patrick D. Nunn (2003:350) they are part of oral traditions that explain histories and genealogies. Many of these myths involve demigods that may turn into an island or can pull the island up from the ocean. Nunn (2003) here distinguishes between 'fished up' or 'thrown down' myths in Pacific countries that explain whether the islands were fished up by the demigod or thrown down. He argues that such distinctions may explain some of the earliest historical accounts of how the islands were created through different environmental processes (for example earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, island-flank collapses, floods, droughts, hurricanes). These myths are also valuable in explaining the historical development of the traditional political system and social organisation

¹⁹ There are differing versions of the legend, for example Chuab turns in to a woman at the time of Chuab's fall after having been set on fire (for examples of variations see Aoyagi 1979; Parmentier 1986; Kitalong 2013; or Besebes and Tellames 2014).

that is still relevant for Palauan society today. In the following, I explore how oral traditions and stories are still recognised by Palauans and Pacific Islanders as an important source of knowledge and an essential link between places and people.

Stories of place and people

Hidden inside the lush green forests of Palau lie several kilometres of old stone pathways that lead to stone platforms where Palauans around 1200-1300 AD had their houses (Snyder, Masse and Carucci, 2011). While walking around on this network of paths that lead to one platform after the other, one is taken back by a kind of spatial density both of and within history. During my six month stay in Palau in 2015, I would often make the one hour drive from Koror to the north of Babeldaob. On my way there I would pass monumental earthwork terrace complexes, comprising large step terraces on ridges and hilltops, dating back as early as 500 BC (Snyder, Masse and Curcci, 2011:165). It is thought that to this date, at least 20 percent of Babeldaob is still covered by these (Snyder, Masse and Curcci, 2011:163). Arriving in my car at the hamlet and my final destination, I would park the car close to the beach front where many Palauans now live in their concrete houses. Yet, it does not take more than a few meters of walking further inland before this network of paths, platforms, and stone carvings exposes itself.

Jacob and I would often walk these paths and while wandering around he would point at a stone or a place that we passed and tell me the name and its purpose. He showed me how it is all part of an intricate system that brings to light historical circumstances and traditions of Palauan social organisation. As Parmentier (1986; 1987; see also Wickler 2002) has argued, myths and legends explain the development of polity and political districts in Palau. The stories of Palau that have been passed on from one generation to the next, tell of how the traditional political system was composed in a symmetrical organisation with particular rankings. One example is the myth of the woman Milad who gave birth to four children: Imeungs, Melekeok, Aimiliik, and, Koror. The four children of Milad create the four corner posts of Palauan society (Besebes and Tellames, 2014:32) and these represent the corner posts of the

Bai (meeting house) (see also Wilson 1993).²⁰ Further evidence of symmetry is found in stonework villages that also show a pattern of ranking in the way that platforms and paths were set up within and between villages (see Wickler 2002).



Photo 5: The stone face at Elab village. Located on the platform Odesongel era Bang in a stonework village. The platform belongs to a clan. The stone has four faces showing that it is the protector and safeguard over the village. It dates back to the stonework era around 1300-1400 AD.

Prior to colonial times (but still visible today) the system of ranking was one where within a *beluu*, meaning a place, village, municipality or country, there were around ten clans (*kebliil*) ranked from one to ten or eleven (Force and Force 1972). Within the clans, the families were also ranked. At the village level, ten members each from one of the ten highest clans would be represented in the village council of chiefs, called *klobak* (Palau Society of Historians 1997). Similarly, the women would also have their council made up by the female titleholders called *klobak el dil*. The four highest ranking chiefs had the power to control decision-making processes (Wickler, 2002:42). Associated with each title was a range of very particular responsibilities. Melekeok and Koror were paramount villages of Palau's two confederations and considered as 'high clans' (Wilson 1993:115). Clans consist of several lineages and include a number of families. The ones considered high status would be the titleholders. These titles are decided by the women elders of the clan and for every male titleholder there is always a female counterpart.

²⁰ A *Bai* is a meeting house that is constructed in a particular traditional style, decorated with paintings of Palauan demigods and symbols, and previously served an important role for where decisions were made by village chiefs (see Tellei 2014).

This reflects the concept of *bitang ma bitang* which means side by side and refers to a concept of duality (Force and Force 1972:12). The two sides are in a dynamic relationship with each other where one does not have the power over the other, but rather established two political units or configurations (Wilson, 1993:98). Melekeok and Koror would be considered being high rank villages as status of being paramount villages (Wilson, 1993:98). The whole of Palau makes up two differing sides as well: *Babel daob* which means upper sea, and *Ioal daob* which means lower sea. The relations between these two sides was one depending on conflicts as well as alliances that were flexible and ever changing (Wilson 1993:98). Similarly, this notion of duality can be found in the relations between men and women as working side by side.

Koror is considered one of the high villages in Palau and consists of ten clans (Wilson 1993:99). For most of my time in Palau, I stayed in Koror with a family on their clan land. The importance of land is reflected in titles and clan names, as both are intrinsically connected to specific place names (Besebes and Tellames, 2014:33). Affiliations to land goes through the mother's clan:

A native-born Palauan is affiliated with his mother's clan; this affiliation is stronger than his association with his father's clan. A person's connection to a village is important to Palauan cultural identity as it helps manifest community ties, social status, and kinship and provides a sense of belonging. Place names, chiefly titles, names mentioned in migration legends, and alliances between individuals or villages from the prehistoric era remain central modes of linking people today (Besebes and Tellames, 2014:32).

As Moked Besebes and Lynda Tellames here explain, the connections between land, clan and identity are still very strong today. This is an essential aspect of Palauan life that must be taken into account if understanding how contemporary issues that affect land, such as climate change, impact Palauans.

During my two fieldwork periods in Palau in 2015 and 2016, I was often reminded about this connection when Palauans told me where they were from, often referring to the place where their family and clan was from rather than where they actually lived at the time. Where one is from is furthermore indicative of obtaining particular stories or information. This is 'place-privileged' knowledge passed down through generations, exclusively for Palauans who are from that particular place. As Jolie Liston and Melson Miko (2011:182) explain about the oral traditions in Palau:

“Even though an individual may know a story, if he or she is not from a specific location, clan or rank, he or she cannot claim aspects or segments of cultural knowledge”.

This became increasingly clear one evening during fieldwork in August 2016. The three sisters of the family and I had just finished eating dinner, and we were now hanging out in the living room while chatting about our day. We had been fishing earlier in the day, and had just finished consuming our successful catch. The mother and father of the household were still sitting at the kitchen table, eating. It was however a special night, as I was nearing the end of my stay and I was going back to Norway soon. While taking photos of each other, we started talking about my Palauan name. We had been talking for months about finding a new Palauan name for me, as there was some dissatisfaction with the one that I had previously been given by someone not in the family (the name was *Orrekim*, which means rainbow, and made me “sound like a hippie” according to the sisters). “What should the name be?”, one of the sisters asked the father and mother. The parents made a few “hmm” sounds indicating that they were thinking about the matter.

The father took the task seriously and eagerly discussed the matter with his wife in Palauan. After some thinking, he stopped eating, put down his fork, and said “Turang. Your name should be Turang”. The sisters gave their nods of approval. I asked him, “What does it mean?”. He then shared the story of the name:

Turang was a woman from Ngerang in Melekeok. She was an old woman and every night after dark she would go down to the shore with a big stick. With this stick she would divert the wind. So if the wind was heavy or if it was filled with sickness she would change the direction of it so it doesn't danger the place. But if the wind was good she would let it pass and let it come through. After she died she went to the sky. She turned into *Mesikt*. That is the little dipper star constellation. She did this because she was the daughter of the creator of Palau, she was a demigod.

We all agreed it was a good name. I told him that I liked it. It reminded me of the Palauan translation of climate change as a change in the world wind. I liked the idea that my new name came from someone who could chase away winds “filled with sickness”. He continued explaining:

I know that story because it is from Melekeok where I am from, where my family is from. You know - I'm a Chief in Melekeok. And because I am from that place I know all those stories. People in different places know different stories, but I know the stories

from Melekeok. And these stories go a long time back, but we still know them today and can tell them. Like the name Turang; even though that story is very old we can still remember and we know it. But they are all oral, not written. That means that someone shared that story to someone, then to the next, then all the way to us. That is how I know it is true and I still know all those old stories from very many years ago because we have to remember.

As this example shows, stories are connected to particular places and persons. The father knows the story because he and his family is from a certain place, which involves “knowing the stories of that place”. Furthermore, even the names of a place have particular stories associated with them as “a marker to identify and locate in detail a specific history and its associated people and places” (Besebes and Tellames, 2014:33). In oral traditions, stories have been important ways of passing down information about genealogies, events, mythical times, and much more (Hviding, 1996:82). This, Stephen Wickler (2002:39) argues, is because “oral traditions are living entities” and stories, such as the one told me by the father, are still very much present and important for Palauans (and Pacific peoples in general) to explain and establish a sense of belonging to a place. Storytelling is as such a highly social undertaking, and for some stories, there needs to be a social relation through kinship. Moreover, stories served as important moral lessons used by elders in order to teach children: “Storytelling was one teaching technique used by elders. ... At night or daytime, elders and children got together to share a story. Older members of the family and the community also enjoyed listening to stories” (Palau Society of Historians, 2006:20).

To “*talk story*” is thus very important in Pacific societies, both as a source of information as well as a form of interaction based on respect. One example of this is the *talanoa* described in the previous chapter, which is characteristic for several Pacific countries such as Tokelau, Fiji, Tonga and Samoa, as a particular style of oral communication (see Tunufa'i 2016). Storytelling has also served as a basis for intergenerational learning as a teaching style before colonial powers influenced islands with an educational system based on written texts.

Stories, therefore, have historically been important sources of knowledge and to maintain social ties. This became increasingly clear when the father continued explaining how Palau's past was connected to clans and their stories, and how this was important for maintaining knowledge and a well-functioning social system:

In Palau, some people came from the North and some people came from the South, through Angaur, and then they spread out. Some people stayed in one place and some people left and went to a new place. My family came from the north and went to Melekeok. Melekeok and Oreor²¹ used to have warfare a lot. But when Captain Wilson came that ended. People all know their lineage and where they are from going all the way back to very early migration. So every clan has a different story. But I know the one from Melekeok because I am from there. [My wife] knows the one from this clan. You know, [my wife]'s family is a very strong one.

There used to be rules for the ocean and the sky and for everything. Yes, in Palau people used to have different rules for everything. The forest, the beach, the birds, the plants, the fish.

You know, before, people used to have the same knowledge. Everyone had the same knowledge and knew the same things before contact. But then when other people came here it all became different knowledge. One person was good at one thing so that person had the knowledge about that, then, another person had different knowledge. Like specialised. And so people had to have different roles to do that special thing, like different Chiefs with different responsibilities. Everybody knew their responsibilities and their roles. They didn't have to tell someone what to do. They knew because it was their responsibility.

In an attempt to underline the importance of the story and its particular connection to kin, the father afterwards turned to me and said "You're family, so you have to know these things". What he explains here is important for a number of reasons. First, it illustrates some of the impact in Palau by foreign colonial powers. Second, he describes the relationship between knowledge and Palauan society. The father uses colonial times as an example of when knowledge changed alongside changes in social roles. The idea that people went from having the same knowledge into having divided responsibilities may reflect the cataclysmic societal changes that occurred during colonial periods through an introduction of European ideas of society, individuality and work.

Marilyn Strathern (e.g. 1988) has famously explored similar differences between Melanesian and Western ideas of sociality as linked to aspects of personhood and gender. Strathern's ideas about the differing approaches to sociality may be useful here as it sheds light on the importance of a person's relations (1988:13):

... we shall require a vocabulary that will allow us to talk about sociality in the singular as well as the plural. Far from being regarded as unique entities, Melanesian persons are as dividually as they are individually conceived. They contain a generalized sociality within. Indeed, persons are frequently constructed as the plural and composite site of the relationships that produce them.

²¹ *Oreor* is the Palauan name for Koror.

Although Strathern's analysis has been critiqued by some for applying what may be considered a rigid division between West and non-West (see Gell 1999; Jolly 1992; 2003), I find Strathern's idea of the dividual efficacious. This amalgamation of one and the many may further reflect how stories are similarly part of one and the many, as a social relation of knowledge. In that sense, the Pacific person is not just one but many, connected to a multitude of scales simultaneously through the sharing of a story with historical, genealogical and societal insights. The explanation provided by the father, which sketches out the importance of sharing the same knowledge and each clan having their own story connecting to history and genealogies, can underline such an idea. This is further emphasised in his final remark regarding knowing certain things when part of the family. In summary, stories of places and people continue to play an important role for Palauans, as it also does elsewhere in the Pacific (see Finnegan and Orbell 1995; Hau'ofa 1994). Before exploring this importance further in present day Palau and connecting it to current political decision-making and governance, it is necessary to provide some historical background.

Colonial encounters and votes for a self-determined future

Remember the four G's: The Spanish came for God, the Germans came for Glory, The Japanese came for Gold, and the US came for Good.

(Former Trust Territory Lawyer, Field notes March 2015)

As this quote shows, there have been numerous colonial powers who for various reasons chose to come to Palau (as well as the wider Pacific region). This has had grave implications for life on the islands as it was and thereby life as it is now. When stating that it is "our turn to lead", one possible interpretation is that President Remengesau was referring to what Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2012) characterises as the long-term undermining of self-determination caused by colonialization. Tuhiwai Smith (2012:175) argues that for the Maori: "[t]he whole process of colonialization can be viewed as stripping away of *mana* (our standing in the eyes of others and therefore in our own eyes), and an undermining of *rangatiratanga* (our ability and right to determine our destinies)". Seen in this light, an analysis of a campaign for a national marine sanctuary could be read as part of a larger de-colonialization agenda taking on

former injustices against those who have ‘lead’ before. And even though I believe an analysis in this direction would certainly not be unwarranted, it would go somewhat beyond my intention for examining the colonial history of Palau in the next section.

Another direction of analysis for Palau’s desire to ‘lead’ is approaching Palau’s foreign encounters in the past as experiences that have been part of shaping and influencing the way Palau manages contemporary foreign relations and ideas about the country’s own position in the world. What importance do past political processes play in Palau’s current profile as environmental ‘champion’? By exploring this question in what follows, it becomes clear that past experiences with colonial practices have also boosted Palauan’s desire to make their own decisions on an individual level as much as on a national level. The result has been an increase in the desire for self-determination and decision-making that prioritises Palauans and underlines what is considered to be ‘the uniqueness’ of Palau.

Early foreign encounters

Returning to the story told by the father on the last night of my stay in Palau, he describes how the ranking system of clans and of titleholders included designated responsibilities within the system (for an overview see PCAA 1976; Palau Society of Historians 1998; Parmentier 1987). There was no centralised government as each village was autonomous with its own leadership structure organised around the councils. Changes to this system however soon occurred when the first Europeans started to come to Palau. There are accounts of English encounters with Palau in 1579 when Sir Francis Drake traded briefly with the Palauans while traveling around the world (Krämer, 1917:69). In 1710, the Spanish ship “Santissima Trinidad” stopped at the Southwest Islands of Palau (PCAA 1976). The most famous account however is from 1783 when the English ship “Antelope” was shipwrecked on the outer reef and thereby signalled the start of more frequent interactions between Palauans and Europeans, documented by George Keate in 1788.

The commander was Captain Henry Wilson from London who proved to be useful for the Paramount Chief of Koror, Chief Ibedul. In return for his protection and supplies of food, Chief Ibedul wanted Captain Wilson to support him in warfare, which had long lasting impacts on the balance of power among the villages and Chiefs making

Chief Ibedul the most powerful Chief (Kitalong, 2014:10).²² This increasing contact between Palauans and Europeans had other severe impacts on the entire Palauan population. Trading vessels were by now becoming more regular in their visits to Palau, alongside beachcombers who came to settle on the islands and whalers who stopped by to obtain fresh supplies (PCAA 1977:174-175). Increased contact also meant the introduction of new infectious diseases and deadly firearms, and it has been said that population numbers dropped dramatically from 50,000 in the 1800s to less than 4,000 in the early 1900s (Kitalong 2014:4; Wilson, 1993:34).

The next major period that would impact Palau greatly was the colonialization by the Spanish. Although Spain had undertaken missionary activities since the 1700s in Palau and throughout the region, it was not until 1874 when Germany and Britain also showed an interest in Palau that Spain began the quest for colonial power (PCAA, 1977:180). After several years of disagreement between Spain, Germany and Great Britain, it was decided by Pope Leo XIII that Spain had the right to establish an administration (PCAA, 1977: 180-182). Spain remained in administrative control over Palau and its continued missionary activities from 1885 to 1898 (see PCAA 1977; Wickler 2002).

Moving forward to 1898, Germany had increased its involvement in Palau gradually and finally purchased the Caroline and Mariana Islands after Spain had been in war with United States, and as a result of the Treaty of Paris therefore ended their colonial rule the same year (PCAA, 1977:190). This was the beginning of the large scale exploitation of Palau for increasing profits in an international capitalist economy as the Germans focused on copra production and mining of phosphate deposits (Wilson, 1993:36). There were also large transformations within the social and political life of Palauans as the Germans disrupted the system of Palauan age groups, *cheldebechel*, and used the chiefly councils to implement German policies instead

²² When Captain Wilson left Palau after a three month stay, Chief Ibedul sent his son Lebuu with him so Lebuu could learn from the British before returning to Palau. Upon arrival, Lebuu was welcomed by the British who called him Prince Lee Boo. Unfortunately, he died after only six months from smallpox and was buried at Captain Wilson's family gravesite in London. The experiences of Captain Wilson's journey to Palau and the life of Lebuu in London have been documented in George Keate's "An account of the Pelew Islands" published in 1788. Keate's account is based on the journals and diary of Captain Wilson, but the validity of Keate's writings have been contested as it is believed to contain a great amount of fiction (see for example Geoffrey Clark 2007).

(Wilson, 1993:36; PCAA 1977). The *cheldebechel* are groups or clubs divided according to age and gender, and have historically had important educational and broader societal functions.²³ Groups still exist today, but older people often complain that young people nowadays are no longer interested in joining them, and that the active groups are mostly older men or women. Yet, these groups have been quite engaged in all matters society, particularly those political (see Wilson 1993).

The Germans forced Palauans to work for them on their coconut tree farms (Parmentier, 1987:47). The first ethnographic accounts from Palau are concurrently from the end of the 1800s, by Johann Kubary who was a Polish ethnologist working in Germany. From 1862 to 1863, the German ethnologist Carl Semper then spent time in Palau. From 1908 to 1910, a team of German anthropologists, Annaliese Eilers, Augustin Krämer, and Elisabeth Krämer-Bannow from the *Südsee Expedition*, carried out their research resulting in what is now the most prominent early works written about Palau (see Krämer 1917).

World Wars

The period and decades that followed were to become some of the grimmest in Palau's history. As a result of geopolitical tensions, the small country of Palau ended up playing a large geostrategic role that severely impacted the lives of all Palauans and many others. Parallel to the period of expansion of the Germans in the Pacific Ocean, the United States and Japan also increased their visibility and role in the region. As part of the Treaty of Paris, Guam, the Philippines, and Puerto Rico became territories of the United States. When Japan declared war on Germany in 1914, the world saw the beginning of World War I. Between 1914 and 1919 the Japanese set up a large naval district in Chuuk, then claimed Palau, and finally deported all the Germans. Palau was subsequently under the rule of the Japanese Imperial Navy. After World War I ended, the League of Nations, which was a newly established international organisation with an aim to resolve international disputes, established a mandate that awarded administration of Germany's territories to Japan (Wilson, 1993:36). As Palau became

²³ Historically, there were many groups and one person would stay in the same group for life as he or she aged and responsibilities changed. The role of these groups changed when colonial powers disrupted the system.

the Japanese administrative centre for Micronesia, the Japanese colonialization practises that followed were intensive and all-encompassing and brought with them severe changes to the lives of many Palauans.²⁴

Due to overpopulation in Japan around 1900, many thousands of Japanese citizens decided to move to Palau and settle down on the archipelago.²⁵ By the time the Japanese administration in Palau ended, there were over 30.000 people from Japan, Okinawa and Korea living in Palau - a number far higher than the Palauans living there at the time (Wilson, 1993:37). The consequences included total rebuilding of Koror through new roads, electricity and health facilities, as well as large-scale appropriation of as much as 84 percent of the land (PCAA, 1978:324). Subsequently, clan owned land became governmental land, a new political system was set up, a new educational system was introduced and formal education was made mandatory (Kitalong 2014).

Although World War II started in 1939 it was not until 1944 that the Americans invaded Palau through Peleliu. In what was one of the most fiercest combats fought out in the Pacific, nearly 16.000 soldiers on both sides were killed (Price and Knecht 2012). The Japanese finally surrendered and in 1947, Palau together with the rest of the islands in Micronesia became part of the Trust Territory of Pacific Islands.²⁶ It was considered a “strategic” trust, meaning it would be administered as an “integral part” of the US, but this was later deleted (Wilson, 1993:38-39). In the 1950s and 1960s, the ongoing threat of nuclear power shaped a strategic motivation connected to military purposes as Micronesia was located in close proximity to other nuclear powers of threat to the United States.²⁷ The US was already implementing military activities such as nuclear testings in the Marshall Islands, as well as training of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) in the Northern Marianas (Wilson, 1993:40). In the proposed agreement with Palau, US pushed for the same kind of activities involving nuclear experiments.

As David Hanlon (1998) convincingly argues in his historical analysis of the US involvement in the Micronesian region, there is a paradox to be found within the US

²⁴ For an extensive account of the Japanese colonial administration, see the historical account produced by the Pacific Community Action Agency (1978).

²⁵ Japan’s population went from thirty million in 1867 to sixty-five million people by 1930 (PCAA, 1978:289).

²⁶ The Trust Territory was made up by six administrative districts of Palau, Yap, Chuuk, the Northern Marianas, Pohnpei, and Marshall Islands.

²⁷ For an in-depth analysis of historical events and US involvement in Micronesia, see David Hanlon (1998).

approach. On one hand the goal of the US was strategic in terms of supporting their own military activities, but on the other hand the US wanted to make Micronesia independent and self-governing. According to Hanlon the latter was done through economic development and by a dissemination of what could be considered an American ideology of how things should be done and people's relations with their environment as well as each other (1998:5-7). The economic development proposed as a solution for Micronesia to regain their self-governance promoting a "better life" (Hanlon, 1998:17) was deeply embedded in strategic military interests and thus used as a technique of power (see also Shuster 2009b). For this purpose, through the US humanitarian approach to secure Micronesia's self-reliant future, they also established a relation of dependency that according to Hanlon (1998) was a paradoxical objective.²⁸

In the mid-1960s, there was increasing pressure from the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) to assure that the remaining colonies of the world became independent.²⁹ Concurrently, development plans and strategies specifically for the Pacific region started to emerge. One of these was the Solomon report, published in 1963 after economist Anthony Solomon visited all trusteeship districts to determine future strategies of the United States. His recommendations were directed towards working on strengthening what was considered cultural ties between the Americans and the Trust Territory countries (Wilson, 1993:43). This was to be done through introducing a US oriented curricula. Those responsible for seeing this through should, according to the plan, be American teachers and volunteers. Similarly, Micronesians would be given the opportunity to travel to America to study.

Following the recommendations, the first Peace Corps arrived in Palau in 1965 and took over the roles as teachers and volunteers in Palauan daily life. Through that, Americans – like the Japanese had done before them - were able to shape notions of rationality and conceptualisations of knowledge (Linda Tuhiwai Smith, 2012:172). Another point mentioned in the Solomon report was the promotion of Palauans and other countries in Micronesia to a permanent affiliation with the United States

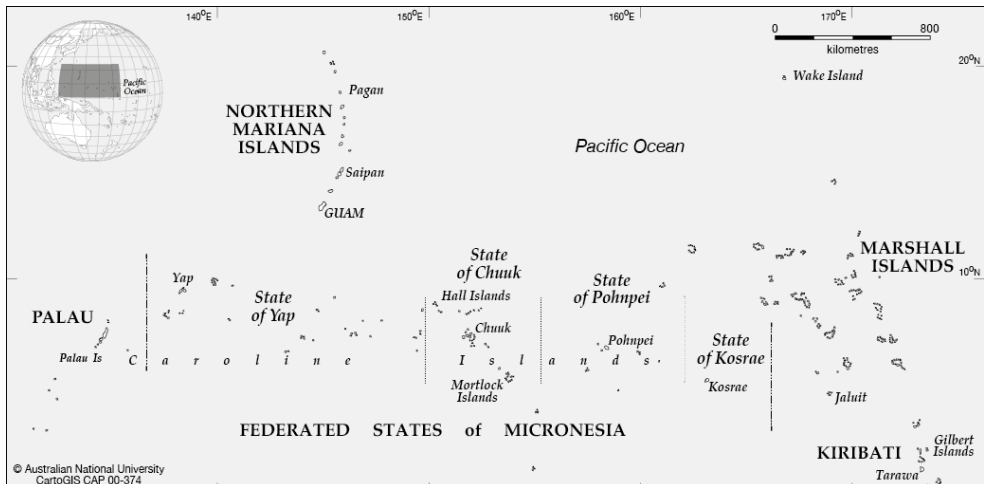
²⁸ Others, such as Epstein (1987), are however more sceptical of such a deliberate approach to create dependency on the United States in Micronesia.

²⁹ The increased focus on independence by the UN became particularly important after many of the trusteeships ended and the "Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples" (UNGA 1960) was released.

approved through a plebiscite. That proved to be the beginning of a few intensive decades in Palau, deciding by vote the political future as a nation-state and establishing the country's broader position in relation to other larger countries. In the historical account that follows, the persistence among Palauans on matters concerning self-determination and political process has truly shown how a small country can take an active stance against a superpower like the United States.

Voices and votes for the future of Palau

In 1975, the Micronesian countries started discussing the continuation of the Compact of Free Association (COFA) and amending a joint constitution. Issues of discussion were concerning the use of land and military presence that was embedded in an understanding of 'free association' (Wilson, 1993:48). The islands of Chuuk, Kosrae, Pohnpei, and Yap voted in 1979 to ratify a joint constitution and together they formed the Federated States of Micronesia. Palau, Marshall Islands and the Northern Mariana Islands decided not to become part of this and drafted their own constitutions and governments. Northern Marianas became a Commonwealth of the United States, while the Marshall Islands and Federated States of Micronesia decided to be in 'free association' with the United States, but both on their own terms.



Map 5: Map of Micronesia. Image credit: CartoGIS Services, College of Asia and the Pacific, Australian National University. Available: <http://asiapacific.anu.edu.au/mapsonline/base-maps/federated-states-micronesia>.

As Palau was preparing to become independent in 1979 they started electing delegates for a government that would be similar to the United States democratic system with a President and three branches: administrative, legislative and judicial. A new Constitution was approved later that same year with an impressive 92 percent majority, which included exclusive rights for Palauans to own land and limited use of the land for foreign military. The United States opposed the new constitution and threatened to cancel their funding to Palau, but with such a majority of votes there was little they could do in stopping the new constitution's approval (see Veenendaal 2013; Shuster 2009b). In 1983, Palauans held their first plebiscite to ratify the COFA which would provide Palau with US \$517 million over 15 years, but would also give United States land use rights for military operations including nuclear activities. The vote was however nullified as it only gave a 66 percent majority vote and not the necessary 75 percent. The COFA was then amended to state that the United States was not to use or store any nuclear weapons for warfare (see Article II, section 324, Palau CFA 1993). However, the proposed COFA still did not receive majority of votes. It was not until 14 November, 1993, after eight referendums that the suggested COFA with the United States was finally approved.

By that time, Palauans had experienced 15 years with unrest and demonstrations as the majority vote was never reached and financial issues were pressing. It nevertheless shows a history where Palauans took a very active role in negotiating their own future and their relationship with a superpower, by declining again and again the issue of nuclear testing in particular. Six Presidents had been sworn in from the time discussions revolving COFA started up until it was approved, with years of disagreements that led to several attacks on anti-compact campaigners.³⁰ In 1992 the original vote requiring 75 percent was amended to a simple majority, as well as reducing the conditions of the COFA from 50 to 15 years and limiting the size of land used for military purposes (Shuster 2009b). On 1 October, 1994 the Republic of Palau

³⁰ Attacks were carried out on Chief Ibedul and Roman Bedor. In 1987, the COFA had been approved after receiving 73 percent of the vote and Chief Ibedul and Bedor therefore sued the government but then dropped it. A group of female titleholders filed the lawsuit again on the claims that the ratification of the COFA was against Palauan constitutional requirements (Wilson, 1993:57). One night Bedor's father was assassinated and one of the most prominent women's house was firebombed.

finally became an independent sovereign country, albeit in free association with the United States. Palau was then, as the final country in the world, no longer in the trusteeship system. Palau was nevertheless the very first country in the world that adopted a constitution restricting nuclear activities.³¹

In drafting the COFA, Palauans showed a strong desire to take control over their own lands and decide how the country could be used. Palau's history shows a growing desire for self-determination after having been under colonial rule for several hundred years. In gaining their independence, the years of ongoing conflicts finally paid off and Palauans successfully negotiated their future against a superpower. Comparing this period to the current climate change situation, Palau's past illustrates that the size of a country does not necessarily mean it cannot make large, ground-breaking decisions and thereby setting a standard for what is possible. Adopting the world's first constitution that restricts nuclear activities demonstrated a clear global position.

Current political system of Palau

Although the current political system of Palau bears strong similarities to the system of United States, there are still uniquely valuable Palauan features. The reason why these are valuable, I argue, is due to social and cultural characteristics that may help explain certain elements within Palauan governance and even diplomatic establishments (by extension also Pacific diplomacy). One such characteristic is that the National Congress is called *Olbiil Era Kelulau* (OEK) meaning 'House of Whispered Decisions or Strategies'. The OEK is bicameral and consists of thirteen members of the Senate and sixteen members of the House of Delegates who represent the sixteen different states. Each House has one elected speaker. Both the senators and the delegates sit for a four-year period, and elections are held at the same time as the Presidential elections. The name *Olbiil Era Kelulau* (OEK) comes from traditional decision-making events when Chiefs gather in the *Bai* to make decisions and discuss important matters concerning the Palauan people. The general rule is that no communication between the Chiefs when inside the *Bai* can be louder than a whisper

³¹ In Article II, Section 3, and in Article XIII, Section 6, the Constitution states that harmful substances such as nuclear cannot be "used, tested, stored, or disposed of within the territorial jurisdiction of Palau without the express approval of not less than three-fourths (3/4) of the votes cast in a referendum submitted on this specific question".

when discussing political matters. This is maintained through the different roles and titles of the Chiefs, where there is a clear division of duties with one person being the messenger who delivers messages to others. By doing it this way, communication and negotiations avoid shouting or loud discussions, thereby maintaining a calm atmosphere.³² In that sense, it underlines the importance of a form of interaction that maintains a calm atmosphere, a feature very similar to the respectful tradition of *talanoa* that has made its way into the UN as mentioned in previous chapters.

The people elect the President of Palau for a period of four years, sitting for a maximum of two periods at the time, serving as both head of state and as head of government. The Vice-President is elected in a separate election and Ministers of the government are appointed by the President and the Senate. Political authority in Micronesian countries that are affiliated with the US have a dual-chief system (see Hezel 2001). In Palau, a Council of Chiefs (*Rubekul Belau*) therefore has an advisory role to the Executive Branch. It consists of sixteen members and is led by High Chief Ibedul and High Chief Reklai, as well as the highest ranking chief from each of the states. The role of Council of Chiefs is, according to the constitution, to advise the President on matters of tradition and customs, as well as to participate in official events and discuss matters considered important for the well-being of Palauans.

Because there are no political parties in Palau and thereby no formalised government and opposition groupings, Palauan politicians that run for office all are what one can consider ‘independents’, although in a Pacific socio-political context the validity of this term might be questioned. The electoral process has been described as “personalistic” rather than programmatic (Veenendaal, 2013:242), and although political interests and promises are expressed, much of it can be said to be symbolic. The Americans tried to establish political parties ahead of elections in the 1960s such as the Liberal and the Progressive Party, but they did not last as they were loosely constructed based on clan relations and “could not be distinguished on the basis of different ideas or ideologies more or less artificially imposed” (Veenendaal, 2016:31).

Small states such as Palau thus face difficulties in maintaining an image of impartiality on an institutional level, mostly because of the strong relations between

³² www.palauoek.com

people often based on family ties (see Veenendaal 2016). This is enhanced by a limited number of people available for a range of positions, often leading to one person having multiple roles to fulfil. The issue of having multiple roles affects the practicality of how to do things and how to make decisions. This was often explained to me as “wearing many hats”. Many chiefs or politicians have other jobs as well, and there can be entanglements of both private and public sector. Conflicts of interest can consequently arise easily and accusations of personal gain may come into question. This is supported by Donald Shuster’s (1994:197-198) description of the political landscape in the mid-1990s as “competition, factionalism, and intrigue characterise nearly all political activity in Palau” including in particular the “tension of inter-clan rivalries”.

Informal coalitions therefore exist that are mostly based on family and clan relations. My interlocutors often underlined the strong connections found between family lineage and political processes, and during times of elections this was an often talked about and conversational topic. Such personal relations were found to have a strong impact on political developments and decision-making. During the 2016 Presidential election, as an example, family ties were particularly apparent as President Remengesau was running against his brother-in-law Senator Surangel Whipps Jr. These kinds of connections are hard to avoid at times, and may consequently split the electors in what could have been a potentially different outcome. Participation by politicians in customary events such as childbirth ceremonies or funerals are therefore particularly important for maintaining a close relation with family members and others. Such events are seen as a possibility for politicians to contribute and show their engagement and commitment in public life. Nepotism may as such be a strong component in the political context, but is hard to get away from. Nepotism may however also constitute a form of effectiveness, where one can rely on one’s own relatives to a much larger degree than one can with strangers. Thus, by using the existing relation through kinship, one may potentially secure a higher level of following things through.

The Palauan interlocutors in Wouter Veenendaal’s (2013) research on democracy and politics in ‘microstates’ describe the situation as one characterised by “closeness”. Through this closeness, he points out that “citizen-politician relations are

stronger” (2013:251). Veenendaal thereby concludes that Palauans are as a result quite well informed about what is going on in relation to political matters. My own interlocutors seemed to verify this impression, but also highlighted certain difficulties to this closeness as it comes with a multitude of responsibilities attached, due to the many ‘hats’ worn by a single person. One of my interlocutors described the responsibilities to me as a circle, drawing it in the air as we spoke. With one hand, she made a circle, and then she placed the other hand right in the middle of the circle, saying that she felt like she was in the middle while the responsibilities were encircling her. “They take up so much time” she said, “but Palauans focus on it a lot and live for it and in it” she further explained. This figure of living “for” and “in” a set of social responsibilities is in congruence with Strathern’s understanding of the *dividual*. Recalling Strathern’s (1988:13) explanation, persons are “constructed as the plural” and a result of “the relationships that produce them”. For many of my interlocutors, this involved responsibilities concerning both their professional occupation as well as those from family relations. The importance of people’s relations was a frequently discussed topic. In reflecting on how it influenced the political system, another interlocutor stated that in Palau “the cultural ties are sometimes stronger than national mandates”.

There is another aspect of this kind of sociality as well, and I here wish to draw on Edvard Hviding’s (2003b; 2012) work in the Marovo Lagoon in Solomon Islands. Hviding shows the substantial amount of foreign contact that has expeditiously and intensely occurred in the Marovo Lagoon since the 1990s through mining companies, conservationists, tourists, and many more. He makes the point that because most of the land is under customary law, any foreign company (e.g. logging company) has to deal directly with the local owners. Because of this kind of direct contact, “a process of highly *compressed globalisation* has unfolded” (my emphasis, Hviding 2003b:542). He defines *compressed* as “the density, in space and time, of these local-global connections” (2003b:542). This process further reveals perceptions of Melanesians by others as islanders that are “lost in time” or “noble savages”. However, and quite on the contrary he argues, they are entrepreneurs and business-minded people (2003b:547-

551). This, Hviding claims, is shown through their interaction with NGO projects in particular, thereby making the point that globalisation is not a one-sided process.

Whereas Hviding talks about what one may consider a *historical* compressed globalisation, I find that the term can also be used to pinpoint a *horizontal* and *vertical* compressed globalisation that goes through multiple scales and levels because of a ‘closeness’ in Pacific societies. By this I mean that there is a ‘density’ in forms of political decision-making found in smaller countries such as Palau, where the political process can be a highly socially inclusive process that spans across scales and levels among people that probably would not be included to that extent in larger countries. This is possible because ‘one may include many’, in the sense that one person may wear “many hats”, *as well as* being part of an extensive kinship system with strong cultural ties. Therefore, in terms of globalisation, the space between local and global may indeed be ‘dense’. Perhaps this explains why a small country as Palau has managed to have what may be considered as an inverted proportional international presence through large-scale decision-making, setting an example for other countries throughout the world and thereby “lead by example”. The following section will explore this idea in particular through Palau’s creation of the national Marine Sanctuary.

The Marine Sanctuary Act: Leading by conservation example

I wish to start with an ethnographic account of how the campaign to get the Marine Sanctuary Act approved materialised in Palau in 2015. It was during the screening of a new movie about Palau I had first heard talk about it weeks before. Eager to see it, Jenny and I jumped into my small rental car on the premiere night and headed off. Jenny was a Japanese JICA volunteer who joined me for the evening.³³ By the time we made the turn into the parking lot outside of the large Ngarachamayong Cultural Center, most spots were already taken. After barely moving in a line of cars all trying to get as close to the entrance as possible, we finally found a place to park in a far off corner. Jenny gave a big sigh of relief as we finally stepped out. In comparison to many

³³ The Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) is a governmental agency that provides development assistance in developing countries. See <https://www.jica.go.jp/english/>.

of the large SUVs parked at the parking lot, my rental car looked like a toy. As we walked closer to the entrance, I was surprised to see the large crowd of people who had showed up this evening for the screening of the new National Geographic movie. When we finally got through the doors, the room was almost full but luckily, we found some seats. A young girl wished us “Happy Earth Day” as we made our way there. I looked around at the audience. There were Palauans, American and Filipino expats, some tourists maybe, some members of the Civic Action Team,³⁴ and many others. Several youths were standing in the back of the room setting up tables. Several Ministers, Governors and Chiefs were there as well. It did not take long until President Remengesau also walked in from the entrance in the back, smiling and waving to people as he made his way to his seat at the very front.

It was 22 April, 2015, also the date for Earth Day. The room was large with a stage in the front, filled up with rows of chairs. There was a podium in the front of the room by the stage, and next to it stood the Palauan flag and two large banners. One said “National Geographic” with the iconic yellow logo, the other one had a photo of the famous Palauan Rock Islands and read “Palau Earth Day 2015: Our turn to lead. Lead by example”. After formal introductions by the evening’s MC and some other speeches, a woman from National Geographic Society walked up to the podium while smiling to the audience. She then started speaking in a soft and passionate way, and I was instantly thinking to myself that I felt like I had heard her voice before. In my notebook I wrote down “Commercial?” She then started talking about the National Geographic project, ‘Pristine Seas’, and explained that their mission is to protect pristine places of the earth. She mentioned the importance of working towards the Sustainable Development Goals that was set to be approved by UN later that year, but most importantly, the project was about “saving the last wild places on earth”. I quickly scribbled down in my notebook “Saving? Last wild place Palau?” She continued:

For you in Palau every day is Earth Day. ... It defines who you are. ... You are like no one in the world, you are unique. Why? ... Because you know when to fish and when not. You understand the balance of nature. You are wealthy because the *Bul* works. ... The *Bul* shows how much the people care about their future. ... If you can maintain the balance you can fish in this environment forever. ... Hold on to your marine

³⁴ The Civic Action Team (CAT) is part of the United States military. Teams are deployed on a six-month rotation and assist with infrastructure and technical missions. The presence of CAT teams in the Micronesian region has existed since 1969, but today the CAT program only has one site left which is located in Palau.

treasures. ... Hold tight your inheritance. ... We know how marine sanctuary works. We in National Geographic have seen this all over the world.

After her speech, the winners of the student essay competition were announced. The woman from National Geographic said that the students' essays about 'Food Security' would be published on their website and the crowd started cheering. We then watched a dance performance by Palauan girls and boys who performed traditional dances to old Palauan songs as well as upbeat pop music. At one point, a person wearing a Napoleon Wrasse fish costume with a Captain's hat joined them on stage and danced with them. He is known as Captain Malii and is the mascot for Palau's Protected Areas.

Then it was time for the screening of the movie everybody had been waiting for. The lights went off and the large screen finally started showing "Return to Paradise", a documentary promoting the creation of a large marine conservation area in the waters around Palau. With the image of a dark sea and the sound of waves, the narrator of the movie spoke softly:

The night is dark, the breeze warm. The ancient mariner knows exactly where home is. In his head an encyclopedic knowledge about his world. About his islands around him. The reefs under water. The fish that feed his family. But the mariner won't make a catch today. He knows the ocean needs time to regenerate. Palau is not yet the name of his country, but the ancient mariner is truly Palauan.

The narrator in the movie referred to the customary Palauan method of preserving or conserving, called a *bul*. The woman from National Geographic Society also mentioned the Bul in her opening speech. That, however, was in reference to the major National Marine Sanctuary bill that at the time of this screening was still awaiting approval from the senate. It finally became clear to me that this evening's Earth Day event was dedicated to promote the President's proposed Marine Sanctuary Act, popularly called BUL after the President with the help of campaigners flagging it as such. The movie highlighted Palauan traditions and the importance of customary conservation methods in the face of external threats, one of these in particular being climate change.

The lights went back on in the big room as the closing credits ran over the screen and the audience started clapping and cheering enthusiastically. Based on the response, it seemed that the movie made an impact on many. As we made our way out of the room after the event finished, I asked some Palauans what they thought of the movie. "It almost made me cry" one responded, others were less emotional but saying it was

“nice”. We finally made it to the back of the room where tables had been set up with stacks of Bento boxes, a single-portion combined meal often served in Japan. After getting one box each (although some grabbed a few for family members at home) we walked outside to try to get our car out of the parking lot where the traffic was already at a standstill.

This description of Earth Day 2015 reflects many of the previous issues of this chapter. The presence of both Japanese JICA and the US CAT team reflect foreign ties and current involvement. United States still has land use rights for the military and Palauans join American defense forces. Even though there is a great persistence of Palauan culture and leadership, claims have been made that “democracy in Palau is safeguarded as long as the country is economically, politically, and militarily tied to the United States” (Veenendaal 2013:263). Furthermore, the gathering of Chiefs, Ministers and the Palauan President at the screening shows the density of leadership and the dual political system. For that reason, Palau has been called the world’s most over-governed place (Patterson 1986). The description moreover shows some of the paradoxes found in Palau, such as driving large SUVs in a place where driving downtown from one end to the other takes about 10 minutes. Palau has one of the highest emissions per capita of any country in the Pacific and is very high up on the world list.³⁵ This is because of the high number of cars and speedboats per person, as well as being dependent on diesel generators for electricity.

Palau is not unique in this regard, as fuel dependency is a challenge across the region. Three-fourths of Palauans live in Koror. This urbanised lifestyle affects the high number of cars, the access to electricity (for air-cons and refrigerators), as well as food habits. Palauans buy most of their food from the grocery stores, and in 2015, 90 percent of all food was imported mainly from the United States. Seen in relation to Palau’s history, these are issues that come as a result of being under colonial rule for a very long time. Palau is still affiliated with the United States, which gives United States priority in shipping food to the islands. This can sometimes lead to quite vulnerable

³⁵ According to CAIT Country Greenhouse Gas Emissions Data that provides historical country-level and sectoral GHG emission data from 1850 to 2014, a comparison between Norway, Solomon Islands and Palau showed that Palau ranks the highest of all. Whereas Solomon Islands had 4.4t CO₂ emissions, Norway had 4.9t, while Palau had 21t CO₂ emissions in 2014. See <https://www.climatewatchdata.org/>.

situations, especially if the ship is unable to make it due to bad weather or other issues. In addition, there are limited options for food crops because of the soil. In that sense, it is somewhat paradoxical when promoting the country as Pristine Paradise, as also became clear on the evening of the movie screening. The term Pristine Paradise thereby reflects other ongoing processes in Palau, rather linked to state building and creating an image or brand associated with the country.

And the way to build this is through large-scale ambitious initiatives, of which the Marine Sanctuary is an example. This is however far from the only one: Palau also aims to cover more than 45 percent of Palau's total demand for electricity through renewable energy through a massive microgrid that will "enable Palau to meet its 45%-by-2025 renewable energy goal five years ahead of schedule, as well as offer electricity at the lowest rates in Palau's history" (Burger 2018). This would thereby be the world's largest solar power-energy storage microgrid. Furthermore, Palau has introduced the *Palau Pledge* which is a pledge all visitors to Palau have to sign when entering the country. The pledge states that every visitor had to "act in an ecologically responsible way on the island, for the sake of Palau's children and future generations of Palauans" (Palau Pledge 2018). And with the pledge which was introduced in 2018, Palau became "the first nation on earth to change its immigration laws for the cause of environmental protection" (Palau Pledge 2018). One final example also includes banning visitors of using "reef-toxic" sunscreens beginning in 2020, meaning sunscreens that contain ingredients that could harm the growth of corals. Palau is then the very first country to implement such a ban. It indeed seems to be "Our turn to lead. Lead by example".

Being vocal on environmentalist issues is not a new issue for Palauans and these recent initiatives fits into a line of ambitious actions and historical drive. As the next section will show, previous events in the past reflect the development of national strategies strongly influenced by ongoing global processes. Through this historical insight, it becomes clear that current strategies are results of ongoing multi-level and multi-scalar efforts. The consequence of this is a simultaneous 'outward' focus by setting examples for other countries that often have 'inward' consequences. The latter comes from the fact that Palauans are ultimately the ones who first have to support and approve the initiatives, and second, live with these decisions in their everyday lives. A

closer examination of the Marine Sanctuary case will demonstrate this, but first, I turn to other important developments that lead Palau to becoming ‘World leading’ in so many areas.

History of environmental position-making: “We want to be free, man”

The 1970s was an important period for Palau regarding issues concerning politics, environment and economic development (Roger 1977). It was also a period where the world (the United States in particular), had witnessed an increase in the dependency on oil and need for continued access. The 1973 oil crisis increased the price of oil drastically in the United States as domestic production was declining which led to a greater dependency on imported oil. In order to lower the prices, one suggestion was the construction of Port Pacific, a so-called ‘superport’ that could accommodate supertankers and move oil in a more economically feasible way from the Middle East (Malcolm 1977). Because there were few ports that could handle tankers of such size, one solution was to build a new oil transshipment port located right next to one of the world’s major ‘oil highways’ 500 miles east of Indonesia and the Philippines, close to Japan. In other words, the location of Palau. Palau appeared to have the “ideal location” first of all because of the country’s geographic location in the Pacific, secondly, its “reef-protected, deep-water anchorage capable of handling tankers of up to one million tons”, and thirdly, because “only 1500 people would have to move from their homes” (Roger, 1977:241). There was however one greater reason why Palau was the ideal location for such a superport, and that was strictly political. It was, according to the consultant behind the project, Mr. Robert Panero, “the only site where stability and security is guaranteed by the US” (Roger, 1977:241).

Reactions to the building of a superport in the Northern reef of Palau were, however, mixed. While some saw the project as an opportunity to make economic revenue, others were far more sceptical and concerned about the impact on the environment and the people of Palau. According to Roger (1977), the project would take over between 39 to 74 percent of Palau’s total land, and concerns were raised that it could cause as dramatic changes as those seen in World War II. Being controlled by foreign countries was something Palauans were still fighting to remove themselves

from, shown through this New York Times interview with an opponent of the project, Moses Uludong: “An outside project of this magnitude, is too big for this little place. It would control our politics, our economy, our institutions, our lives. It is far beyond us. And after centuries under foreigners, we want to be free, man, free” (Malcolm 1977).

Uludong was part of the *Save Palau Organization* headed by Chief Ibedul and formed as a consequence of the superport discussions (see Roger 1977; Kitalong 2014).³⁶ Other traditional leaders, women’s groups, and students also opposed the project in fear of impact on social and cultural life from this large-scale intervention. According to the 1977 New York Times article, the opposition was afraid of “cultural pollution”, which was described as the “fear of drastic change in traditional ways of life” such as ownership of land (Malcolm 1977). The case created a lot of controversy within Palau and beyond, coming at a crucial point in time, when Palau was in the process of creating a constitution and becoming politically independent. The superport project was eventually stopped in 1977 after Congressman Philip Burton, a key voice in United States Congress on the territories, announced that he would not support its construction (Leibowitz 1996). The case has later been called the Palauan “environmentalist/development dilemma” (Epstein, 1987:148) where economic needs must to be weighed up against environmental destruction (Leibowitz, 1996:33).

In collaboration with representatives from The Nature Conservancy (TNC), ten engaged Palauans took action in 1994 and decided to form Palau Conservation Society (PCS). There are many successes to their work, amongst others having seen one of the founders and former Director, Noah Idechong, receive the Goldman Environmental Prize in 1995 due to his efforts on marine conservation. He was also an important figure in the passing of the Palau Marine Protection Act of 1994 that regulated protection and sustainable practices of marine plants and animals. Since then there have been many other similar campaigns arranged by PCS, but also increasingly foreign programmes and projects. Conservation continues to be an important and central issue, and the reason for this is, as explained to me by a PCS staff member, that “conservation is

³⁶ *Save Palau* quickly gained international support of Nobel prize-winner George Wald and environmental lawyer Julian Gresser, as well as organisations such as Friends of the Earth, Environmental Defense Fund, Natural Resource Defence Council and Pacific Science Association (Roger 1977).

rooted in Palauan culture” and therefore Palauans have a greater understanding of the concept.

The role of conservation can in particular be seen through initiatives such as the Micronesian Challenge, which began in 2005 under President Remengesau and vowed to conserve 30 percent of near-shore marine resources and 20 percent terrestrial resources. The aim is to accomplish this by 2020 as a joint initiative with the Republic of the Marshall Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, the Territory of Guam and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands. Palau’s main national conservation mechanism is the Protected Areas Network (PAN) which was established by law in 2003 through the Protected Areas Network Act and is the largest conservation effort nationally in Palau (see Borrevik, Ngirmang and Emesiochel 2018). The funding for PAN sites is partially provided by the Protected Areas Network Fund which is a non-profit corporation. The fund revenue is provided by a departure tax (called the Green Fee) for the purpose of environmental protection paid by visitors leaving Palau.³⁷ Palau is also undertaking important work within coral reef research, and sustainable management of marine resources is a priority for the Palau International Coral Reef Centre, which is the leading research institution in Palau.

The national initiatives are as shown many, and when the opportunity arises, issues are also flagged in international arenas such as the United Nations. In 2009 during an annual meeting at UNGA, former President of Palau, Johnson Toribiong, declared that Palau would become the world’s first national shark sanctuary and ban all commercial shark fishing.³⁸ The shark sanctuary quickly became an important case for Palau, with large news sites such as BBC calling it a “pioneering approach” (Black 2009) and environmentalist groups such as International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and Pew Charitable Trusts praising it. With Palau taking the lead, several shark sanctuaries were established in other Pacific countries as well, such as Guam, The Northern Mariana Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia and the Marshall Islands.

³⁷ The Green Fee was introduced in 2009 and today provides an important source of funding for the country.

³⁸ The Palau Shark Sanctuary was the world’s first national shark sanctuary, banning commercial shark fishing in Palau’s 237,000 square miles of ocean.

UNGA has also been a place where Palau and other Pacific nations have repeatedly spoken out against climate change. Having all UN member states present provides these island countries with opportunities to express their concerns of “several looming threats to our continued peaceful way of life, and indeed to our very existence”, as President Toribiong stated during the General Assembly in 2009. Some months before COP15 in Copenhagen 2009, Palau and the Pacific Small Island Developing States (PSIDS) furthermore initiated a UN resolution entitled *Climate change and its possible Security Implications*³⁹, which calls for an international response and a serious consideration of the potential security implications of climate change. This was the first time climate change had been characterised as a security issue and it laid the groundwork for bringing the issue further to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in 2011. During the 2011 General Assembly President Toribiong announced that Palau together with Marshall Islands would “seek, on an urgent basis [...] an advisory opinion from the International Court of Justice on the responsibilities of States under international law to ensure that activities carried out under their jurisdiction or control that emit greenhouse gases do not damage other States” (Toribiong 2011). Concerns were however raised that this would undermine the work of the negotiations arranged by the UNFCCC, as well as whether or not the ICJ was the right place to direct such a request (see Sands 2016). This has led to some frustration among Pacific nations and the impression that “our voices were drowned out by other states' priorities” (Toribiong 2011).

The Marine Sanctuary Act

In an address to the UNGA, former President Toribiong (2009) said that:

Palauans have lived throughout history in symbiosis with the sea. We are seeing now though that the sea, which has long been the source of our sustenance, is both rising in rage to destroy us and becoming barren. This fury was caused by the abuses of humankind and we therefore need to take every action necessary to allow the oceans to heal themselves.

In days gone by, the traditional chiefs of Palau would declare a *bul* - a moratorium to protect a resource which had become scarce. This traditional concept, now popularly known as conservation, shows the way for us to move forward.

³⁹ A/RES/63/281

The points made here by President Toribiong reflect very similar ideas expressed by current President Remengesau in relation to establishing the Marine Sanctuary Act.⁴⁰ On 4 February, 2014, President Remengesau gave a keynote address to world leaders and others at the UN conference 'Healthy Oceans and Seas' in New York. In the speech, he announced that Palau aimed to establish the world's first nation-wide Marine Sanctuary designating Palau's entire ocean as a regenerative zone for marine species. 80 percent of over 500,000 square kilometres would become a fully protected marine reserve banning all commercial fishing. The remaining 20 percent would become a fishing zone for Palau's domestic market. After the President's speech, the conference crowd stood up in excitement and eagerly applauded the initiative. However, it still had to be approved by the Palauan Senate and House of Delegates, as well as the majority of the Palauan people. Therefore, in 2015, the President launched a nation-wide campaign to promote the Marine Sanctuary. One of the most visual ways in which the campaign was manifested was through the use of a logo with the Palauan word "BUL". BUL quickly became a reference to the Marine Sanctuary bill in daily discussions. The campaign was a joint effort between the President, Pew Charitable Trusts, the conservation marketing organisation Rare, and National Geographic Society.

In Palauan, *bul* can be translated as 'regulation' or 'restriction' and has its historical roots in a Palauan customary method of preserving or conserving. One may 'put a *bul* on something' to help conserve it, such as crabs while carrying eggs, betel nut if the trees need to regrow, or a certain kind of fish that appears to be low in numbers. Likewise, a system of reef and lagoon tenure can also be included in the meaning of a *bul*, which means that the right to fish in an area is controlled and one needs permission from a Chief (Johannes, 1981:64).⁴¹ A *bul* is always announced by the Chief in a village for a particular period of time and to show that there is an ongoing *bul*, a sign is put up. As explained by a Chief: "*Bul* is not written. But we have to put up a sign. A sign [so] that anyone who come[s] to the village just see that sign on the side of the road and say oh – it's a *bul* going on, now let's find out what the *bul* is about

⁴⁰ Since President Remengesau's first election in 2000 he has had the motto "Preserve the best and improve the rest", while flagging his ideological stance as "Our environment is our economic future, and our economic future is our environment. They are one and the same" (Shuster, 2005:177).

⁴¹ Similar conservation methods are found across the Pacific. Examples include *tabu* in Fiji, *kapu* in Hawai'i, or *mo* in Marshall Islands.

- so although it is not written it is spoken, by way of looking at something.” The logo for the Marine Sanctuary was quite different; it said BUL in capital letters with a pattern inspired by traditional Palauan paintings in the colours blue and yellow, the colours of the Palauan flag. As soon as the campaign started, stickers were put on cars, pamphlets were handed out, and Palauans were wearing the popular BUL t-shirt.



Photo 6: *Bul* versus BUL. The traditional bul sign (left), and the BUL campaign sign (right).

The President himself named the Marine Sanctuary BUL in his speech at the UN. BUL thereby quickly became a popular way of referring to the proposed bill. The campaigning became increasingly visible in news, on social media and in the coffee shops where people met. BUL soon had its own Facebook page. The campaign’s mission was to convince the Palauan people that creating a Marine Sanctuary would be beneficial for them and the country. The most important people to convince were Governors, many whose states depend on fishing revenues. The campaigning was highly visible in the newspapers. Public letters were published in support of the BUL as Marine Sanctuary, either from other politicians, public figures, as well as receiving international attention from high profile supporters of the marine environment such as the Ocean Elders.⁴²

Making an argument through storytelling

The Marine Sanctuary Act campaign wanted to include all Palauans and thus used arguments that highlighted a Palauan national identity. As an example, during the

⁴² They are a group of global leaders that “use their collective influence to pursue the protection of the ocean’s habitat and wildlife” (Ocean Elders 2017). Members include high profile people such as Prince Albert of Monaco, Sir Richard Branson, Ted Turner, and Jane Goodall. In 2017, President Remengesau joined the group.

movie-screening event on Earth Day, President Remengesau honoured Palau and its traditions. In particular, he highlighted the importance of himself being a fisherman and having learnt his skills from his grandfather. In general, this is a point he often makes when speaking about issues such as conservation and a changing marine environment. These changes include destructive fishing practices, as well as harmful effects due to global warming. In the President's speeches, the Marine Sanctuary Act was as such often presented as part of a solution to changes as it would let the ocean nurture itself. To strengthen this point, the President frequently used the argument of Palauan traditions with the support of scientific research. Exemplified here from a speech at a climate change event:

The marine sanctuary is not something that was recently thought of or conceived; marine sanctuary is simply a *bul* in Palauan. ... Our forefathers and our traditional leaders have practiced [it] over the years [and] they proved successful... [If] we let the status quo continue, science is telling us that it is not going to last. So if we do something about it, science is also telling us that there is still a chance, ... we can better manage, better sustain what needs to be done whether it is climate change, global warming and the need to protect and sustain our resources through sanctuaries or management of our resources.

A closer look at this speech reveals that he is making a range of arguments. Firstly, he uses the importance of Palauan environmental knowledge that *bul* represents here. This knowledge is important, and he himself can verify it because he is a fisherman just like his father. The knowledge about the ocean held by fishermen is frequently mentioned by Palauans as unique (as is also explained as such in Johannes 1981). *Bul* is considered a unique traditional knowledge that shows how Palauans *know* what is right.

Secondly, the President uses science to confirm what Palauans already know then. He is reinforcing the scientific importance and 'truth', as well as showing that science is something Palauans must relate to. His argument puts forward an argument that Palauans are aware of the value of science, but also highlights the value of Palauan traditions as also scientifically verifiable. Playing on such multiple knowledges, a sort of 'epistemological pluralism' (Hviding 2003a), thus becomes an important argument that speaks to both Palauan audiences, as well as non-Palauans ("Western" or "modern" societies) who value science as truth.

Lastly, he talks about how traditional knowledge can be the answer for current damages and changes, thereby showing that Palauans are very much aware of what is going on in the world. As such, the President positions Palauans in the world in a sense, within the problem itself, and thus suggesting that Palauan knowledge can be a solution to a global problem. Remembering the standing ovation the President received when he introduced the proposal for the Act at the UN conference 'Healthy Oceans and Seas' in 2014, this may be a clear indication that 'the world' agrees with him. In that sense, the BUL has become a global concept, but is however beyond conservation, because embedded in it is a tradition of knowledge stemming from Palauan forefathers who 'knew'. Drawing similarities to storytelling are thereby imminent: the speech is about the connection to the ancestors, and the importance of knowledge that has been passed down through generations. This knowledge is connected to Palau, to a particular place, as well as the ocean – and ultimately – it is connected to the world. There is a clear sense of morale in the speech, as a solution to a problem, thereby underlining the importance of approving the Marine Sanctuary. And it is not just President Remengesau who takes this storytelling approach. There is a very similar line of argument fronted in former President Toribiong's speech to the UNGA as well when Toribiong states that *bul* is the way forward, not only for Palau, but "for humankind".

The Marine Sanctuary campaign thus involved issues about creating an image of both Palau and Palauans through highlighting what makes Palauans special. The answer was Palauan knowledge, as well as fronting that Palau is "Paradise". This "Paradise" however has paradoxes, such as high carbon emissions and little sustainable food resources. Furthermore, the President cannot really declare a *bul*, only traditional leaders can. Moreover, similar conservation methods to the *bul* are found in many other Pacific countries as well, so it is not unique. Therefore, I suggest that the huge emphasis on *bul* being unique is rather an aspect or attempt to create a sense of national identity of what it means to be Palauan, similar to using the Pristine Palau brand.

The Pristine Paradise brand was also popular during the campaigning for the Marine Sanctuary. 'Pristine' as a description of Palau was, and still is used by the President and other. Pristine Paradise establishes 'Palau' as a brand, and is a representation of the country particularly aimed at visitors (tourists). However, through

my observations during the campaign, I noticed that it is increasingly being incorporated internally as providing a sense of national pride among Palauans themselves. This was seen by its usage in settings that were solely for Palauans, for example in speeches given to a Palauan crowd in Palau by Ambassadors, the President, or Chiefs. “Pristine” becomes something to live up to, creating an image of the ideal place. The idea of Pristine Palau was as such slowly being incorporated into a construction of a collective national identity through the Marine Sanctuary Campaign.

“If only I was a fish”

At the time of the launch, the BUL campaign was popular overall in terms of getting the Marine Sanctuary approved among the Palauan people. The principle of a no-fishing zone was easily explained in Palauan terms, as well as popularly reminding people of their past and what was considered the traditional way of life. Furthermore, it established Palau as a global actor and as a strong supporter of the environment. The Marine Sanctuary Act was finally approved in October 2015 and news around the world wrote about Palau “leading the world” in how to take care of the ocean by creating the world’s largest marine conservation area.⁴³ The desire to “Lead by example” as the banner had said at the night of the movie screening was now a reality. Moreover, it was “Our turn” and not any other country’s, as so often has been the case in Palau’s past. By showing this kind of leadership, the President aimed to attract international attention. This kind of attention turned out to be very important because its aim was to attract funds. The campaign thereby reveals a dual purpose on several levels; nationally, it is created for Palauans through creating a sense of collective identity, as well as internationally, with the purpose to attract foreign investors who can sponsor the Marine Sanctuary.

Perhaps this multiplicity of purpose on multiple levels was why, when the following year in August 2016 I came back, opinions about the national Marine Sanctuary had changed and there even seemed to be opposition to it. Not everyone was

⁴³ See for example PR Newswire, 2015. Palau to Sign National Marine Sanctuary Into Law. October 22, 2015. Online: <http://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/palau-to-sign-national-marine-sanctuary-into-law-300164614.html>.

convinced that Palau would benefit from having the sanctuary anymore, particularly economically. Some also expressed scepticism to using the name *bul* for the Marine Sanctuary Act. Part of the reason for this was that the BUL was being associated with the President and not a Chief. It was also visualised through a sticker or a shirt, not the traditional stick with leaves tied to it. In addition to this, it had become a written law, as opposed to being spoken rule. This was, according to some Palauans, a sign of being part of the democratic system of governance and not the traditional system. Furthermore, while a *bul* had a timeline and was no longer needed after a certain amount of time, the Marine Sanctuary Act was there to stay indefinitely. As such, the purpose of the *bul* had been changed through becoming the BUL of the Marine Sanctuary. People therefore started questioning the purpose of the Marine Sanctuary, and felt, perhaps somewhat ironically, that there was not enough focus on the Palauan people.

I could sense this already the year before, when discussions emerged around what a *bul* really meant. In 2015, one interlocutor had placed the Marine Sanctuary in relation to the problem of food import and the rise of non-communicable diseases such as diabetes:

People ask me what I think about [Marine Sanctuary], and I don't think it is a bad idea. It is good to protect the ocean. But it leaves the people out of it, there needs to be more focus on the problem which is people. Marine sanctuary is a good thing. Right. Just - are fish dying or are people dying?

His concerns had seemed to spread among Palauans the following year when I returned. When I came back in August 2016, new t-shirts had been made to illustrate the growing concern. This time, the t-shirts had a different message than before. The message was a quote from when a youth had stood up at a community meeting earlier in the year and said: *Ulekum ak bai mlo ngikel* ("If only I was a fish").

The reason for this, was in reference to a discussion at the meeting about the Marine Sanctuary. Concerns were raised that too little attention was given by the political leadership, meaning the President, to the people of Palau. In particular, there seemed to be growing dissatisfaction among Palauans about not knowing what the President aimed to do regarding the loss of income from commercial fishing. The youth's quote caught on, and a few weeks later t-shirts were made. What had started as

a campaign that seemed to create a sense of national pride among Palauans with strong support, after a while received somewhat more negative responses as there appeared to be unanswered questions in relation to the viability of the Act. Questions were directed particularly to the loss of income, even though the Marine Sanctuary is currently receiving an increasing amount of financial support from international funders.



Photo 7: “If only I was a fish” t-shirt

What are some of the final insights provided by the Marine Sanctuary Act campaign? In many ways, the campaign talked about what it meant to be Palauan and why Palauans were unique. This uniqueness was based on having particular knowledge about a certain place, a result of the strong connections between land, ocean, and people. From that perspective, underlying acts of state building occurred, through strengthening the Palauan sense of having common identity. Creating a sense of national pride was key to why it gained such initial strong support. After decades of colonial rule, followed up by years of fighting about the constitution, Palau’s road to becoming independent has been long in the making. Palau has indeed been “entangled in a broad web of economic, social, and cultural forces” as Wesley-Smith (200:307) has argued. Sometimes these have caused immense challenges, as seen in the superport case, the nuclear testings, and as a geopolitical issue of war. Seen in that light, the Marine Sanctuary finally presented something that showed Palauan ‘uniqueness’, cheered on by others around the world. It showed that ‘the Palauan way’ could provide an answer to a global problem. For this reason, it became highly popular among many Palauans. One may therefore say that the campaign had a strong inward focus which

was directed at Palauans through fronting aspects of national identity and self-representation. But there was also a striking outward focus to the BUL campaign.

Through the campaign, BUL became a global term, going far beyond Palau. In that sense, calling the Marine Sanctuary Act for a BUL was an example of ‘culturalising’ conservation in accordance with a Palauan vernacular term. It made Palau gain a world leading position in marine conservation, thereby leading the way for other countries to follow. A small country, that for centuries had been told what to do by other countries, was now showing other countries how it could be done. Through approving a national law of conservation, Palau took the lead internationally. The Marine Sanctuary became an answer to current global changes, and by making the Marine Sanctuary an Act, it positioned Palau in world. It reflects how Palau and other Pacific countries that have implemented similar conservation initiatives, are expressing very clear opinions about wanting to take a leadership role internationally. It is as such an example of global position-making.

However, problems occurred among Palauans because of the campaign’s multi-level and multi-scalar purpose, thereby creating clashes. In other words, it may seem that while BUL gained international importance, BUL did not live up to the Palauans’ expectations, as they rather associated BUL with *bul*. Thomas Hylland Eriksen (2016:2) refers to this as “a clash of scales”, where expectations of the purpose behind environmental engagements do no work together. His point is that such clashes occur when the concerns of international actors and local realities are different. In following this argument, one could explain the dissatisfaction experienced by some as experiencing such a ‘clash’. While the inward focus was aimed at what it meant to be Palauan, the outward focus instead reflected a global political agenda.

Moreover, this ‘clash’ also reveals that a conversion between scales can be a difficult endeavour. Enlarging or converting a vernacular term, such as *bul*, was highly successful when converted from a national context to a global context like the UN. International attention was however difficult to convert back to a national or local context in a similarly meaningful way. I suggest that this relates to the experiences by Palauans that there was not enough focus on the people, a topic that I explore more in-depth through a regional focus in Chapter 6.

As a final note, I wish to add that the history and current political processes in Palau reflect similar issues also found in other Pacific countries. These include shared experiences of the challenges associated with colonialism, independence and state building. It also includes Pacific experiences with foreign powers and tending to foreign relations. National decision-making and position-making may therefore be an effective contemporary approach to how Pacific countries can take international leadership roles within areas of conservation and larger climate action. In that that sense, Palau is doing important diplomatic work by fronting national actions and Palauan knowledge on a global scene at the UN. And as illustrated through the speeches by the Palauan Presidents, they are drawing on characteristics of storytelling and place-based knowledge. Yet, as will be shown, the opportunities for other Palauans to share their stories are not as straight forward. The next chapter therefore turns to the some of the ways climate change experiences are shared with others, or, perhaps, not shared.

Chapter 5

Transforming Stories: Outputs and Policies

Introduction

In this chapter I explore practices of knowledge-sharing and different ways of experiencing climate change in Palau, as both physical, social and cultural impacts as well as through the creation of documents. The link between these two dimensions may at first seem somewhat unclear, but a closer examination reveals that many of the dominant ways of sharing climate change experiences and information about Palauans' social realities goes through a process of transformation when placed into documents. I therefore discuss how local climate change stories reach out (or not), through processes of transformation into language and in forms that fit with certain reporting criteria or document aesthetics. One major reason for this transformation is to meet the criteria set by external donors in order to receive the needed funding for a climate change project or programme. As outlined in Chapter 3, many of these projects aim, in a somewhat unidirectional way, to assist Pacific islanders through initiatives that teach them about climate change by 'raising their awareness' or by 'building their capacity' to adapt to impacts.

The stylistic preferences and systemic forms of knowledge included in the outputs and reports for these projects are, however, decided on and created by the donors themselves. In that sense, an inverted process of what the EU calls "knowledge management" (EU, 2015:8) takes place, where the information included in the reports that reach donors (such as EU) is stripped from the social realities of how climate change impacts and affects Palauans. It leaves out important complexities by applying "knowledge practices already familiar" (Riles, 2001:5) to the donors. A similar process of transformation of information also took place in the creation of Palau's climate change policy. One reason for this is that it has to comply with standards compatible to international climate frameworks, such as UNFCCC's Green Climate Fund or the Adaptation Fund. By turning the attention towards the drafting of documents, the

gathering of information, and the selection of data, I suggest that it reveals an ambition for knowledge-sharing that somewhat ironically also sets in motion an abatement of information due to the use of standards that manage the social realities of Palauans.

Looking for climate change

When I arrived in Palau in early 2015, my focus was on learning about climate change impacts, and how Palauans understood and lived with them. For the most part, I must admit that I had envisioned these to be more or less directly linked to the observable physical changes of people's surroundings. After all, through pre-fieldwork preparations I had read large numbers of scientific reports that stated with high confidence how severely the Pacific Islands are affected by climate change. In Fiji and Solomon Islands climate change had also frequently been talked about, even though people I spoke to sometimes had very different explanations and understandings. I was therefore initially somewhat surprised by what at first I experienced as a lesser focus on climate change in Palau. It surprised me because I knew the Palauan government had in the recent years been quite vocal on environmental issues internationally. Soon after arriving, I therefore quickly started following up some of the initiatives I knew were active in Palau in order to try to get a sense and overview of climate change related issues. Put bluntly, I was looking for climate change. Where was climate change?

My own ideas about climate change and my own research were quickly put to test when, during one of my first conversations about climate change with an older Palauan man and proclaimed environmentalist, he asked me why I wanted to study climate change on high islands. Fiji, Solomon Islands and Palau were all high islands. They were not like Kiribati or Tuvalu which are atolls and low lying and therefore more susceptible to impacts such as flooding, he continued. Why had I come to Palau that had high islands? I did not have a good answer. Was there *less* climate change in Palau because of the height of the mountains, I thought to myself? When is climate change present, and when is it not? How is climate change experienced if it is not experienced as physical impacts? His question stayed with me long after our conversation.

Tropical cyclones

It was not long, however, before I got the first stories of how Palauans had physically experienced some of the impacts included in scientific reports. Palau was hit by two 'super typhoons', called tropical cyclones in the South Pacific region, consecutively in 2012 and 2013.⁴⁴ Never before had storms that strong hit the islands. The devastations were massive and a state of emergency was declared twice. Cyclone Bopha reached Palau on December 2, 2012, and with wind speed up to 250 kilometres per hour it hit the states of Ngaraard, Ngiwal, Melekeok, Ngchesar, Peleliu and Angaur. 112 houses were completely destroyed, 136 houses had major damages, and hundreds of people were displaced and staying either in shelters or with relatives (Palau National Emergency Management Office 2013). Not even a full year after, cyclone Haiyan (infamous for its deadly destruction in the Philippines) hit Palau November 7, 2013 and passed directly above Kayangel State with wind speed of 260 kilometres per hour. Of the 36 houses that were destroyed, 22 were located on Kayangel atoll (National Emergency Committee 2013), but damages were registered across all 13 states.

The following year, in December 2014 just before I arrived, there was an additional warning of a tropical cyclone, but eventually it passed just north of Palau. Therefore, in January 2015, many were still alert to the potential threat of yet another cyclone reaching Palau, and cyclones were often used to make a point about something changing. "Before, there were cyclones every 7-8 years", a man explained to me, "now there have been 3 in a row". Many Palauans that I spoke to mentioned the cyclones and seemed perplexed by their frequency and intensity in recent years. Even the way in which the cyclones hit was questioned, as they would normally come from the north, as explained by this interlocutor:

It was something different, it was a new experience. When you drive up the compact road, you will see the plants like this

and then he made a hand gesture showing that they laid horizontally flat down to one side.

You see, the wind was on one side, it was really weird, even in Kayangel, they saw two really tall coconut trees that were intertwined together. I guess one wind was going

⁴⁴According to the National Hurricane Center, the definition of a super typhoon is that they are considered a category 5 storm with a wind speed of minimum 257 km/h which makes it the strongest category ranging from 1 to 5. For an overview of categories, see <http://www.nhc.noaa.gov/aboutshws.php>.

one side and another was going opposite side. The winds were trying to find where to go. The wind normally never touches that side and those areas.

For many Palauans, the increase in the occurrence of cyclones and their devastating impacts became a very physical experience of the powers of a changing climate. President Remengesau furthered such a view in a statement to ABC News noting that “the northern Pacific was once free of typhoons but global warming may be responsible for Palau being hit by two major typhoons in less than 12 months” (ABC Radio Australia 2013). Attributing an increase in the occurrence of cyclones to climate change has been found elsewhere in the Pacific as well (see Rubow 2013; 2018), even though scientific projections may not necessarily always support this correlation (Rubow 2018). In understanding why Pacific Islanders may attribute cyclones as a visible sign of climate change, Cecilie Rubow has argued that for many Cook Islanders it connects to the extreme experience of a cyclone (2018:43-44).

Similarly, when I discussed the connection between climate change and cyclones with a Palauan environmentalist she explained to me that climate change came up as an issue particularly when something made a great impact on them. “People are like animals; if you corner them they get scared and frightened,” she said, using cyclone Haiyan as an example. When I asked her if she was scared, she promptly replied, “I am not afraid of climate change. I am afraid of people’s ignorance. The climate is changing and we are not changing with it”. The problem, according to her, was that people forget their concerns very quickly. This, she said, was mainly because the national government provided support after disasters right away. That meant, according to her, that the people who had their homes destroyed did not *need* to worry because the government rebuilt their houses again, thus getting everything back to normal. Yet, with regards to this issue, people’s experiences differed.

During a trip to a northern state, I visited a family whose house had been partially destroyed by the cyclones. When they built it ten years before, they had not thought that cyclones would hit their beachfront house. Haiyan flooded the entire house, covered it in mud, and crushed parts of the roof and walls. Yet, getting assistance to rebuild was more difficult than anticipated “because of political reasons”, I was explained. I was told that this family had difficulties receiving the needed assistance

because the locally elected leadership belonged to another clan than the affected family. These two clans did not support each other politically, and the affected family claimed that the lack of assistance was because of this. If so, it certainly reveals the strong ties between kinship and politics in Palau and the possible consequential outcomes of such social ties. It also reflects the complexity of climate change issues in Palau (and other places in the Pacific): namely that climate change effects involve not only environmental challenges, but are also deeply embedded in sociocultural and political contexts.

Such connections do not always work in a negative way. A group of men based on traditional Palauan social organisation played a key role after the cyclones hit. Historically, the men's group (*cheldebechel el sechal*) consists of younger men of a hamlet who do not have traditional titles. Such groups have been important in Palauan traditional social organisation and used to have an important educational role prior to the introduction of the modern school system. Nowadays, they still exist although their educational significance has decreased. However, after the cyclone in 2013 when roads were blocked to the hamlet and the communication between Koror and northern states was limited, the members of the men's group were first to arrive at the location where the storm had hit. They quickly gathered and provided important initial assistance to those in need. The traditional organisational structures thus provided important disaster relief, even before the national government and NGOs could reach the area.

Sea level rise

Cyclones were not the only concern of the family I visited. When I asked if they were worried that cyclones might destroy their house again, the husband replied "It is not just that," referring to the cyclones, "it is also global warming and sea level rise". He pointed down to the beach where the waves calmly went back and forth across the sand, about 20 meters from where we were standing. He explained that the ocean came a lot further in during high tide than it used to when they first moved there, and that this had changed just over the last ten years. This, he said, was an ongoing concern for the whole family.

Many others also shared this worry about the rising sea, amongst others Serah, who lives in Koror like most Palauans. Serah's house is located in one of the most affected hamlets in Koror in terms of sea level rise. Because the house is right at the waterfront, she frequently experiences flooding of her house alongside other consequences of a rising sea. When we met, she would often tell me stories about how she came late to work that day because the sea was gushing at her or how she involuntarily had encounters with marine life right in her living room:

There's this basket on the floor, and one night I put my hand in there when I was sleeping. But there was something cold in the basket. So I thought – is there food in this basket? And then when I touched it again it was a baby crab, and the mommy was in the second basket! Why are they doing that? Don't they know that they need water? They must have taken the wrong turn. But the one in the toilet, that was just... I had no idea [it was there]. I heard bubbling, cause they do that. I stand up and it is staring at me!

Although Serah would tell me such stories with enthusiasm and humour, mimicking her reactions of surprise when realising there is a crab staring at her from inside the toilet, the crabs are not the most serious problem. Other encounters include mosquitoes, sea snakes and even crocodiles, which present a much bigger and more direct threat - in addition to flooding. Yet, as she said several times, “moving is not an option”.

Serah invited me to visit her one morning at sunrise when the tide was high. When I got there, Serah, her husband and her mother were getting ready for the day. Serah and I walked to the back of the house so she could show me how high the tide came up. The tide on this particular morning was not noteworthy high, but the dense mangrove only a few metres away from the back door was a strong indicator of the proximity of the ocean. Serah's family leases their house and have done so for many years, and they do not have anywhere else to go should they be forced to move. But as Serah pointed out to me several times that morning: “Moving is not an option. Everybody wants to live close to Koror. It's close to the hospitals, to the stores, the banks are here, and work is here”. One major issue is that Serah's mother is sick and has to live in close proximity to the hospital because of the frequent doctor's appointments. “If it was only me, you know, I'd move,” she said, “but I really can't”.

In talking about what options she had, she mentioned that she had got in touch with the state administration of the municipality and that they had been there for a

briefing. The state representatives had previously built cemented ditches between the houses in an attempt to reduce the flooding, but the water was going over the ditches now. Yet, the solution to the problem was unclear, and so was whose responsibility it was to find solutions. “Yes, they [the state] have seen it and taken pictures,” she explained. “But it’s the chain of protocol. I, as a residential, talk to my legislator of the hamlet, and then the legislator talks to the zoning peoples, and then him and the zoning people talk to the governor about the final approval.” But when discussing responsibilities and asking her what should be done, her options largely consisted of what she herself could do, such as build a two storey house herself: “We either have to make it a two storey, or move it further in, away from the mangroves. And that option is not gonna happen. I definitely have to look into making a two storey. Cause there’s a rule for leases that must be ten feet away from the main road”.



Photo 8: Living at the sea level. A house lying dangerously close to the water front in an area prone to flooding in downtown Koror.

When I came back a year later in 2016, I talked to Serah again and she told me that the flooding had got worse. Although she had been in contact with the state administration again, it had yet to be resolved what her options were and whether or not she would have to fix it herself. Serah’s experience, as well as the family living further north, reflect how changes in sea level and storm patterns may impact Palauans,

as is the case for many other Pacific Islanders as seen in Chapter 3. The complications brought on by political circumstances, sometimes tied into complex social contexts, overall reflect challenges on both an individual and state level in approaching climate change impacts. Climate change, through its many manifestations, be it crabs, floods or cyclones, presents fairly new, complex and all-encompassing challenges for Pacific islanders and their countries, and as shown in Serah's case, issues concerning the responsibility to 'fix it' are not clear. In Palau, the entanglements between sociocultural networks and governmental structures furthermore complicates the issue. Land issues in Oceania, involving ownership, belonging, and identity, are complex and difficult from the outset (see Lundsgaarde 1974; Crocombe 1987; Toren and Pauwels 2015). If, as in Serah's case, they have to live close to the hospital and the family has no other land, the options are limited. There are nevertheless an increasing number of initiatives in Palau that are trying to deal with such issues, as the next sections will explore.

Climate change awareness and outputs

Even though conservation and environmentalism have been subject to a long-standing focus in Palau, it is only in the last fifteen years or so that climate change has become a more common public topic of conversation, following several national campaigns and initiatives. In 2013, concerns were raised during a preparatory meeting for the climate change policy that Palauans were not "aware enough" about climate change and that this lack of "climate change awareness" was a cause of "major concern" (Jonathan 2013). In ways similar to Solomon Islands and the region at large as mentioned in Chapter 3, the result has been an increased implementation of awareness projects in Palau.

In Solomon Islands the projects are often implemented by NGOs or agencies that are part of the Council of Regional Organisations in the Pacific (CROP)⁴⁵, which makes it difficult for the National Climate Change Office to gain an overview. This is further complicated by geographical and demographical challenges, as the population of more than 600.000 Solomon Islanders is widely dispersed across six large islands

⁴⁵ The Council of Regional Organisations of the Pacific (CROP) aims to improve collaboration among intergovernmental regional organisations (IGO) in the Pacific region on sustainable development issues. CROP consists of fourteen IGOs. See: <https://www.forumsec.org/council-of-regional-organisations-of-the-pacific/>

and several hundred smaller ones. In Palau, however, the situation is slightly different, first of all because the country is smaller in size with almost 80 percent of around 20.000 inhabitants living in or around the state of Koror, and second, because projects are often headed by local actors, even though the project itself may be part of a larger regional initiative. Such initiatives are, nevertheless, a very important way in which Pacific Islanders both receive and provide information about climate change. But, as I will show in what follows, there is a discrepancy in the information that is provided in the final reports of projects and the experienced challenges of Palauans taking part in the projects.

Two projects that were ongoing in both Solomon Islands and Palau during my fieldwork were the Pacific Adaptation to Climate Change Programme (PACC) and the Global Climate Change Alliance (GCCA).⁴⁶ PACC is a collaborative programme in 14 Pacific countries and its goal is to “enhance adaptive capacity on the ground, and it is driving the mainstreaming of climate risks into national development planning and activities” (SPREP 2018). It is funded by the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and the Australian Government, but is implemented by United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP). GCCA on the other hand is an EU initiative that supports sub-programmes in 38 different countries worldwide, those categorised as least developed countries (LDCs) and Small Island Developing States (SIDS). The focus for the GCCA in the Pacific is being “a platform for dialogue and exchange of experience between the EU and developing countries”, as well as “a source of technical and financial support for the world's most climate-vulnerable countries” (GCCA 2012). The subdivision Global Climate Change Alliance: Pacific Small Island States (GCCA: PSIS) Project is directed at Pacific Islands in particular and its objective is to “promote long-term strategies and approaches to adaptation planning and pave the way for more effective and coordinated aid delivery to address climate change at the national and regional level” (Pacific

⁴⁶ My mentioning of these two projects in particular serve only as examples of how climate change related initiatives are organised and documented, I am therefore not directing a critique of these particular projects. Furthermore, The GCCA has a number of sub-projects and has in recent years been renamed as GCCA+ to symbolise a new phase of the project. I have here used GCCA as a generic term for the whole initiative.

Community 2016b). This includes, as both the PACC⁴⁷ and GCCA⁴⁸ mention on their websites, *capacity-building* activities and *awareness* of important climate change knowledge as vital in doing this work. These projects are only two out of many initiatives that play key roles in how stories about climate change in the Pacific region are shaped, as well as reach audiences outside of the region.

In other words, or, rather, in the words used in the GCCA project document, it is about *output* (Pacific Community 2016b). The final product of the GCCA project is a set of *Country outputs* as well as a *Regional output*. These *outputs* consist of a large amount of reports about the project's thematic focus. Reports contain information such as timelines of the project, outlining when other reports were written and delivered, the kind of document frameworks used, as well as highlights of project *implementation*, including particular actions undertaken in specific *communities*. In order to find out what kinds of actions that are needed to achieve a desirable outcome, the project representative does an *assessment* consisting of a range of activities that involve participation of people who live in the area. Here is a relevant description about how one particular project 'does awareness' in Palau, given by the project representative at a seminar I attended:

We do awareness when we go to these communities. So, you have current status of livelihood sectors, then we do field observation, then focus group discussions and field assessment. Then we have the community identify the problems and causes, let's say to sectors water and food security. Then at the end of the assessment, the community members in the workshop come together and identify the solutions and prioritise. So this is the settings we have, how we do assessment: climate change awareness, field observation, focus group discussion, field assessment, and then group workshop to identify solutions and prioritise sectors.

This quote comes from the completion seminar of the project in Palau. One of the main tasks for the national project representative is to implement the project in selected communities and collaborate with respective national governments, in addition to providing information about the results of the work to the donors.

After having explained the different parts of the assessment that she had successfully undertaken, the Palauan project representative highlighted some of the challenges that had been identified by the participants. One of the top challenges that

⁴⁷ See for example <https://www.sprep.org/news/pacc-essay-competition-raises-awareness-college-students>

⁴⁸ See for example <http://www.gcca.eu/knowledge/training-and-capacity-building>

was uncovered through this process was that local governance structures struggled in finding their roles in relation to each other and in relation to climate change issues:

Sector A is governance and that is really number one. In order to get information down to communities you need to know where to bring the information to. And who is the one to talk to - the traditional *and* the governor? Some states are having problems with the division of rules and functions. Because the chiefs can communicate to the members of the clan, but the governor is elected by all the people. It is a problem.

This example reflects the experience of the family whose house was destroyed by the cyclone, showing what then seems to be a common challenge as climate change issues bring forth complicated entanglements of Palauan kinship and politics. Yet, in final project reports, the *country output*, this challenge is not mentioned. Why is that?

I suggest that the discrepancy between the final reports and the experienced challenges in the communities has to do with what is considered to be useful knowledge, for what purpose and how. Let me explain by elaborating further on the case. Contrary to what may be seen as a failure to document problems that were uncovered, the project was seen as a success in that it achieved its stated objective. In the final GCCA report, key result areas are measured by amount of people reached through the project:

Key result area 1 focused on mainstreaming climate change into national and/or sector response strategies. ... A total of 248,593 people benefitted from the endorsed mainstreaming activities. ... Key result area 2 focused on better equipping countries to access climate change funds. With support from the project, Cook Islands gained accreditation as a National Implementing Entity to the Adaptation Fund, and the Government of Tonga prepared a Climate Change Fund Bill. Together, these two activities benefitted 119,073 people. ... National climate change adaptation projects were successfully implemented in each of the nine countries (key result area 3) ... The total cost of implementation was EUR 4.641 million; 82,905 people directly benefitted from these projects. Training and capacity building in climate change adaptation was delivered to a total of 2,938 people – 55 per cent men and 45 per cent women – through all four key result areas (Pacific Community, 2016a:1-2).

In the Palau representative's presentation below about 'amount of awareness', climate change knowledge and concerns had been successfully documented through survey:

Regarding levels of knowledge about climate change: 14 out of 59 said they don't know anything at all. 84 know a little about climate change, we are happy to say that $\frac{3}{4}$ of these people have moderate to high to very high knowledge about climate change. That means they can come here at talk about climate change to other community members. So we wanted to know the level of concern and the impacts that have moved into their lives. 96 percent say they are very concerned and only 4 percent say no.

A similar approach is found in how indicators of achievements is measured through the means of hectares in the same project, as illustrated by this diagram:

| # | Sector | Indicator Level 2 (Development Outcome and Outputs) | USP-EUGCCA indicator achievement |
|----|---|--|---|
| 6 | Sustainable and inclusive Agriculture (Agriculture and Food Security) | Agricultural and pastoral ecosystems where sustainable land management practices have been introduced with EU support (number of hectares) | 1,1608 hectares ¹ |
| 7 | Sustainable and inclusive Agriculture (Agriculture and Food Security) | Number of people receiving rural advisory services with EU support | 2,939 people ² |
| 11 | Energy | Number of people provided with access to sustainable energy services with EU support | 60 people ³ |
| 23 | Natural Resources, Environment and Climate Change | Number of countries/regions with climate change strategies (a) developed and/or (b) implemented with EU support | 15 countries ⁴ |
| 24 | Natural Resources, Environment and Climate Change | Number of hectares of protected areas managed with EU support | Management of protected areas was not an activity/ output of the project. |
| 25 | Natural Resources, Environment and Climate Change | Number of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) applying Sustainable Consumption and Production practices with EU support | ¹⁵ |

Figure 2: EURF Level 2 Indicator Achievements. This diagram shows the indicators of achievements for the project, measured within the EU Results Framework (EURF) (USP, 2017:68).

Such diagrams are standard procedures in many climate change projects, where results are measured through outcomes and outputs, and achievements are quantified. The GCCA project only serves as one example of many.

Anthropologists including Escobar (1995) and James Ferguson (1990) have critiqued similar standardised practices found in development projects. Ferguson (1990) argues that development is an “anti-politics machine” that ignores the local realities through “depoliticization” to the benefit of bureaucratic state power. Drawing on Foucault’s (1991) understanding of discourse and power as the controlling mechanism for development agencies, Ferguson argues that development projects discard political realities (1990:68). Bureaucracy rather becomes the ‘machine’ for development. Although these arguments may be useful in order to highlight inequalities of what is recognised as valuable knowledge (or as Escobar [1990:5] asks, “whose knowledge counts?”), I direct my focus here to what the climate change projects and the *outputs* aim to do and the consequence it has for local experiences of climate change issues. I thus follow Maja Green (2003:124) who makes the point that

such standardisation approaches are a “process of transforming policy visions into *manageable realities* through the social constitution of ‘projects’” (my emphasis).

Based on her involvement in several development projects in Tanzania, Green (2003:123) shows how “professionals create the social space of projects as envisioned in documentation” through, for example, workshops and assessments. She explains:

Project documentation and, to an extent, project workshops, create the project as a kind of entity separated off from other kinds of social realities *in order to make it manageable*. This separation is achieved through specific styles of documentation and analysis, as well as through the dynamics of workshoping where management logic ensures that participants produce standard project documentation as the output of a restricted style of ‘logical’ reasoning which is diagrammatically represented (Green, 2003:138, my emphasis).

Social realities are here according to Green separated from the documentation as a means to make the realities ‘manageable’ in the sense that information is transformed into what is considered a logical framework. In the case of the GCCA project, these are decided by the EU when developing objectives and indicators, such as the EU Results Framework applied in Figure 2. In Green’s analysis, which draws on a Strathernian understanding of management and control as audit cultures (Strathern 2000), the project through its format and prescribed documentation outcomes serves as a way to reproduce representations of climate change as already stated in the project objectives.

This means that it is possible to compare outcomes of the project, especially with regards to projects that span across several countries as they often do in the Pacific. Success, or, *indicators of achievement*, is categorised and listed according to being able to implement and execute goals or objectives. As an example, the PACC project in Palau was in an early stage of the implementation listed by SPREP as not having fulfilled the requirements and therefore ended up on a list that categorised Palau as one of the least successful PACC countries. As a former project member from Palau told me: “Before we used to be the worst, but now we are making the best results of all!” The countries are as such being measured up against each other regionally in terms of whether or not they are following the project’s strategic plan.

Yet, more personalised experiences and reflections about the successes of a project may differ greatly from what is presented as achievements in a report. As a concrete example, when talking to the Palau GCCA representative over a cup of coffee,

she told me that the most important issue for her when doing the project was to ensure that the families she worked with benefitted from their involvement. According to her, these benefits included the cultural value of ensuring that the land is fertile and healthy as it belongs to a certain clan and has done so for hundreds of years. Furthermore, providing access to water was in her opinion a way of making sure that Palauan families could stay on their land and live a good life. These achievements include emotions and values connected to family and kinship. Although these are “social realities” (Green, 2003:138) of the people living in the ‘project communities’, they are very difficult to measure and not included as part of the project documentation even though they are considered to be the most important issues by the project representative.

This therefore leads me to the final point I would like to make concerning these types of climate change projects, which is that of “knowledge management”. In a *Concept Note* about the GCCA written by the EU (2015), one of the central components of the project is that of “knowledge management”. In the note, the term is defined as sharing experiences and lessons learnt, and it is highlighted that the role of “knowledge management” is becoming very important because there is an “over-abundance of information available in the climate change arena, but finding the right kind of reliable information remains a challenge” (EU, 2015:8). This ‘over-abundance’ may serve as part of an explanation of why *outputs* are standardised and made ‘manageable’ so that the EU and GCCA representatives may more easily find the information they are after. But the intention is then to ‘manage’ the knowledge that the project countries have access to. It seems inevitable to make the point that this is upholding uneven power and knowledge relations by defining what is “the right kind” of information.

While this may very much be the case, my point here instead is to turn it around and rather draw attention to the “knowledge management” working the other way, looking at that which involves the documentation in the form of *outputs*. This information is stripped from the social realities of how climate change impacts and affects people in countries like Palau, leaving out the important complexities and multifaceted ways. By silencing information about impacts of, for example, family values through reporting standards that prefers quantitative information provided in prescribed formats, these kinds of climate change stories rarely reach a non-Palauan

audience. For this particular project, the EU gathers information about climate change in Palau and other Pacific Islands mainly through reports that use specific indicators of achievements that the EU has created. In that sense, I would claim that, somewhat ironically, it becomes a form of self-censoring the EU's own knowledge and understanding of the issue at hand through numbers, diagrams, and bullet points. The outputs become forms of reproducing what was already known to the EU, by using language already known and report aesthetics most similar to their own.

The Palau Climate Change Policy

The reading of and preoccupation with documents in fact became an integral part of my methodological approach during fieldwork. The importance of this was underlined through my interlocutors' own preoccupation with similar documents, demonstrated through providing them to me with the dual purpose of offering sufficient information, as well as inviting me to participate in the process of creating them. Early on after arriving in Palau in 2015, I was invited to participate in the ongoing consultative process of the Palau Climate Change Policy.

During the Inception Meeting of the policy in November 2014, President Remengesau had strongly underlined the threat of climate change to Palau: "Climate change is a real life threat to us and we, the Small Island Developing States, are on the front line. We must take action now to protect ourselves from the impacts of climate change" (Magbanua, 2014). The action he was referring to was to develop a national policy. The process of creating what would become the *Palau Climate Change Policy For Climate and Disaster Resilient Low Emissions Development* (PCCP) started in 2013. It was a time-consuming and often described as a comprehensive process over several years, that included the participation of many people:

Over 150 individuals were involved in broad consultations to gather information and guide priorities. Standard planning tools included facilitator-led National workshops, sector-based focus groups, and 20 key informant interviews. Risk and capacity assessments followed accepted methods. Costs in the Action Plan were formed from expert opinions within sectors and then aligned and streamlined across sectors. In addition to assessments from earlier initiatives, this Policy incorporates the most recent peer reviewed scientific evidence and projections available. ... Additional technical and financial assistance was provided by the Secretariat of the Pacific Community, USAID, GIZ, FCG ANZDEC, and local consultants (PCCP, 2015:11).

The working group participants represented ten different sectors of Palau: 1. Health, 2. Biodiversity, Conservation and Natural Resources, 3. Society and Culture, 4. Critical Infrastructure, 5. Finance, Commerce, and Economic Development, 6. Agriculture and Fisheries, 7. Tourism, 8. Utilities, 9. Education, and 10. Good governance. The office responsible to oversee the in two-year long consultation process that started soon after the Inception meeting was what was then called Office of Environmental Response and Coordination (OERC).

The OERC was established in 2002 when Palau became a member of UNFCCC. It was created to be the UNFCCC focal point, as well as other multilateral environmental agreements such as for example the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (UNCBD) and UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD). Due to governmental restructuring parallel to the process of developing the climate change policy, the OERC became the Climate Change Office in 2016. This restructuring was partly done because OERC at the time was part of the Office of the President of the Republic of Palau, which meant that the staff of the office changed together with the national election held every four years. The consequence of being located under the Office of the President was described by one staff member in terms of fragility. “It is a fragile office because of the physical set up” that meant staff would often change and that “climate change is something brand new” which added to the challenge. The Climate Change Office is therefore now under the Ministry of Finance, meaning that the staff can continue working there regardless of election outcomes. The office still serves an important support role for the President as well as coordinating national climate change initiatives.

From an anthropological perspective, the process of creating the climate change policy is interesting because it involves a number of actors on multiple levels, all gathered to develop what may be seen as a national narrative of climate change. Compared to external climate change projects, a national climate change policy has a much longer time-span and is incorporated into systems of governance. Furthermore, this policy in particular included taking a highly participatory approach in order for it to be as comprehensive as possible because “climate change ... affects all parts of society” (PCCP, 2015:6). That is what makes climate policy interesting as an object of

analysis in itself; first because it takes on social dimensions of society, and second because it shapes a larger narrative of climate change in a place like Palau. Approaching the policy as narrative opens up for an analysis of interpretation and ‘sensemaking’ (Agar 2005).

In Chapter 3 I discussed the importance of certain visual imagery, such as melting ice or starving polar bears, and how they can constitute politically charged narratives (see Orlove et al 2015). Policies similarly present political narratives that are effective in conveying powerful messages, as exemplified through Palau’s Marine Sanctuary Act serving such an important role in global position-making. A policy-making process may as such provide an understanding of the conditions under which political narratives arise and their potential political agency.

Policies can, nonetheless, be read in a number of ways. Cris Shore and Susan Wright (1997) mention several aspects of policy which anthropologists are particularly well versed to address: “... as cultural texts, as classificatory devices with various meanings, as narratives that serve to justify or condemn the present or as rhetorical devices and discursive formations” (1997:7). Shore and Wright approach policies as an “increasingly central organizing principle in contemporary societies, shaping the way we live, act and think” (1997:i). This multitude of meaning is why they argue that policy should be approached as ethnographic data for anthropologists. A focus on policy will further "reveal larger processes of governance, power and social change" that are "embedded within ... particular social and cultural worlds or 'domains of meaning'" (Shore and Wright, 2011:1). Policies are flexible and have trajectories, they claim, and policies reflect the rationality of the time of writing.

My reason for focusing on Palau’s climate change policy is similar. Inspired by Anneliese Riles (2001; 2006) I understand policy as an ‘ethnographic artefact’, which involves looking at the policy document itself as a producer of knowledge and relations. It does not only reveal governance and power, but it also illuminates challenges related to climate change issues, and a public definition, or, perhaps, an agreed understanding of what climate change is within a Palauan context. Therefore, it may be one of the most important climate change related documents a country produces, as it potentially includes what are considered to be the most relevant issues

for one particular country. So, what can the climate change policy of Palau reveal if we follow its trajectory and explore the underlying rationalities?

The Palau Climate Change Policy as a steering document

Shore and Wright question what constitutes ‘a policy’, and make the point that policy is manifested in a number of ways such as through language, speeches, written documents, institutional mechanisms, as well as people’s experiences (1997:5). Yet, they discuss only minimally the constituted legal status of a policy, even though issues of governance and power are important subjects for investigation. One may get the impression that issues concerning a policy’s legal status are taken for granted, regardless of what country the policy is created in. The legal power of policies in Palau may vary, depending on its legislative process as well as whether or not there are associated resolutions that express support for the policy. Yet, as per 2018, the PCCP does not hold legal power in Palau on the same level as a law. So what purpose does the PCCP have if it is not a law, directing Palauans to take certain actions on climate change? Compared to the Palau Marine Sanctuary Act, the climate change policy did not have to go through the legislative process of the Palau National Congress and does not therefore automatically have the force of law. It was nevertheless often referred to by many Palauans as one of the most comprehensive policy processes Palau has implemented, in taking an integrated approach that included all government sectors.

I suggest, then, approaching the PCCP as a sort of steering document that “moves into new social and political spaces” (Shore, Wright and Però, 2011:14). Because it holds no legal power, its role as a steering document becomes more relevant because the policy has as its mission to promote rather than legally bind certain actions. I therefore further suggest that the climate change policy has more of a narrative role as already mentioned – setting the scene for what climate change ‘is’ in Palau and what ‘role it plays’, so to speak. This view is also reflected in the description of the PCCP’s main objective as stated on the workshop registration form:

The key objective of a climate change policy framework is to articulate Palau’s overall position on climate change and to guide decision relevant to climate change across all sectors and at all levels (community, state, national, regional and international). The policy will also call for the development of action plans and sustainable finance

mechanisms as well as clarify key stakeholder' roles and responsibilities with regards to climate change adaption and mitigation efforts.

As opposed to hard law, this approach may rather fall under the genre of “soft law” where instruments of governance are used to guide action rather than prescribe by established law. Soft law is similar to the concept of “soft power” developed by Joseph Nye in order to describe a kind of power drawing on “intangible power resources” such as culture and ideology (Nye, 1990:167). Nye developed the concept to describe foreign-policy relations between countries, as a way to influence others through ‘showcasing’ what may be considered by other countries to be desirable values. Creating the Marine Sanctuary in Palau is a marvellous illustration of this, in that Palau became an example of being ‘caretakers’ for the ocean, thus demonstrating true leadership in conservational practices. Even though the Marine Sanctuary Act is only valid for Palau, its purpose can be said to be international as a way to display good practice and establish Palau as a global ‘Leader’ within the field. There is consequently both an inwards (national) purpose and an outwards (international) one. That means its purpose is simultaneously directed towards a wide range of audiences on several levels.

I make a similar argument for the PCCP as well, yet noting important differences in the process of creation, as well as the policy’s purpose. The PCCP has a strong inward and outward purpose, but not in the same way as the Marine Sanctuary Act. The PCCP acts rather as a link between national and international institutions (such as the international climate regime), in particular those who provide funding for climate change initiatives. These are the institutionalised mechanisms of the policy, and because of these as I will show, what one may consider the human dimensions is not provided space similar to the example provided from the projects.

Cultural and social aspects of Palauan life were not encouraged during the consultative workshops, and the participants’ experiences of climate change issues were transformed from personal stories and ideas to policy language and document form. This is also reflected in the use of other existing documents that had been written before for other purposes, thereby in a way reusing and reproducing information ‘seen before’ as with the case of the EU’s “knowledge management”. Despite this, many of the participants developed a sense of ownership to the policy because they had

participated in the process of creating it. This then serves as an example of the importance of having a relation to the production of knowledge.

Workshop assessments with “the usual suspects”

By the time I arrived in Palau in January 2015, the workshops for the ten defined “sectors” were already underway. I was therefore able to jump right into the final six workshops and join the discussions. From December 2014 until February 2015, all of the workshops with the sectors were organised and in March 2015, there was a two-day National Consultative Workshop for all the participants, government representatives, traditional leadership, as well as non-Palauan consultants who flew in for the occasion. The policy was then written up in the following months and then finally approved towards the end of the year, just before the COP21 meeting in Paris in December 2015. However, the official launch of the policy took place in August 2016 during Palau’s first Environmental Symposium, thus concurring with my final month of fieldwork there.

Much of the groundwork for the policy was done through the sector workshops where invited representatives from each sector participated. The sector workshops were often held at a hotel in downtown Koror and they lasted a whole day from morning to late afternoon. Depending on the sector, there was anywhere between five to twenty people attending the workshops I participated in. Each workshop was facilitated by a handful of Palauan consultants who had been hired for the occasion. All of these facilitators specialise in environmental consultancy and are often part of similar meetings or workshops. A participant later told me that this was important for its success, because the OERC wanted it to be a Palauan-led process. Having Palauan consultants also ensured that they already knew of the participants, including their relationships with other participants, either through work, family or clan, the neighbourhood or hamlet where they lived, as well as if they held a traditional title, and much more. This shared knowledge of knowing about each other became increasingly clear when during several workshops, a facilitator announced that it was time to start, but before doing so, the participants were kindly asked to “leave your hats at the door”.

Most Palauans are acutely aware of the complex network of social relations that have an impact on their relationships with each other. This highlights the argument by Veenendaal (2013) about ‘closeness’ between people, discussed in Chapter 4, and as a reflection of what by one interlocutor was described as “the smallness of Palau”. One person may also often serve several different roles that include several different responsibilities, both work related and cultural responsibilities tied to traditional roles. A common phrase I often heard as a description of this situation therefore was that Palauans “wear many hats”. One consequence of this is that the “usual suspects”, to use a phrase by an interlocutor, attend the same meetings repeatedly. This has been a particular constraint for Palauans who are involved in projects where donor and/or project leader is based in another country or region, such as the EU, and demands continuous reports of the project progress. Furthermore, as opposed to decision-making in larger countries, where policy makers are considered to be “faceless” (Shore and Wright, 2011:10) because of the distance between them and lay people, Palau and other smaller sized countries are in a very different situation where everyone already knows each other’s ‘hats’.

This desire to leave behind the participants’ social and cultural relations was further emphasised through the workshop set-up itself through which the form of knowledge sharing was done by assessments. Upon arrival, a timetable for the day was handed out along with some other informational and preparatory documents. One included “The Adaptation Systems Egg” which explained how adaptation should be included in all kinds of societal systems, such as “natural”, “social”, “economic”, “built”, and “institutional”. Another paper showed the “Sector Adaptive Capacity Assessments” that included a diagram containing six generic questions related to the sector’s knowledge and approach to climate change.⁴⁹ The participants were then taken through the various stages of the workshop program, starting with an overview of the climate change situation in Palau according to the latest scientific prognosis and an explanation of the handouts. The entire group was then asked to come up with a vision statement for the sector, which included an exercise of envisioning the ultimate achievement and goal for the sector. After that, a risk assessment was carried out by

⁴⁹ See appendix C.

going through a list in a diagram of the physical environmental impacts that are forecasted for Palau.

The participants were asked how they thought these impacts would affect their specific sector. Their answers were then reported back to the facilitators who verbally confirmed and edited the responses until a verbal confirmation was provided from the participants agreeing that the response could be recorded in written form. The edited response was simultaneously written down by another facilitator whose role it was to take notes on a computer and thereby filling out the diagram. The computer was projected on a screen so that all the participants could see a large version of the diagram. Participants were then broken into groups in order to fill out the “Sector Adaptive Capacity Assessments” that had been handed out at the start of the day. After each group had filled out the assessment, the responses were collectively reviewed and reported back to the facilitators while the answer was written down in a giant diagram projected on the screen at the front of the room.

As final points on the agenda, the participants identified key informants for each sector through providing suggestions to the facilitators who wrote the names down. Everyone then received a questionnaire containing questions about how they perceived the workshop and their evaluation of the day. All of the notes from the workshop were then reworked by the facilitators to serve as what was considered ‘content information’ for the policy. This information was, however, reworked into new diagrams and matrixes. Furthermore, the potential disagreements that were voiced, as well as the personal experiences or insecurities among the participants were not included in the final content of the policy.

Language, documents and policy uncertainties

What insights may be gained from these policy workshops and the ways of collecting information? Shore and Wright (2011:8) argue that in order to explore the process of creating a policy, anthropologists are particularly well situated to find meaning in what seems “self-evident”, concerning meaning made by the actors involved and how this works on multiple levels:

In the authoritarian view, policy formulation begins with a text (or vision statements) and its passage into legislation, then moves down the chain of command through

various levels of administration, from national (and supranational) civil servants to local officers and finally the 'street level bureaucrats' who, Lipsky argues (1979), finally 'make' policy in their interactions with people on the ground. By contrast, anthropologists focus on how people make sense of things, i.e. what policy means to them. They are interested in the 'natives' point of view'.

As further argued by Shore and Wright, anthropologists are concerned with how people make sense of things, and in this case, how they make sense of creating the policy. Through participating in the workshops for the PCCP, it became clear to me that the process itself shaped how people made sense of climate change. This was because climate change issues and the notion itself had to be continuously explained, framed and explored within a framework that was both considered appropriate for the various different sectors, as well as conforming with institutional standards of the international climate regime.

Such standards may relate to what Riles (2001:66) calls the 'aesthetics of documents' which includes "the power of language, its performative force, and its use in documents and designs that are supposed to have specific political, emotive or rhetorical effects". Riles places herself within the ethnography of institutions, and her aim is that a focus on "the aesthetics of bureaucratic practices" will provide insights into "the character of contemporary institutional knowledge" as well as how information may become an anthropological subject itself (2001:16). She explains: "informational practices might come into view as 'designs' in their own right and also as maps across a territory, a path we might have taken or might take" (Riles, 2001:16). Instead of taking "traditional anthropological methods of making sense" (2001:1) of the material, she examines 'analytical forms'. These forms include amongst others the network of institutions and knowledge practices, the drafting of documents, form, set-up, and diagrams. Through this approach, her attempt is to find aspects of an ethnographic problem that may be 'too familiar' because we (all people, anthropologists included) are continuously surrounded by similar documents. These are knowledge practices that are endemic within modern institutional and academic analysis (Riles, 2011:1-2).

By approaching the workshops and the observed production of Palau's climate change policy in a similar manner, one may gain insights into how knowledge is

actually produced and reproduced. Before writing responses in the large diagram projected on the screen, the facilitators would orally rephrase the participants' feedback, and ask the person who gave the specific feedback if a shorter edited sentence was accepted in rephrased form. For example, during a workshop exercise to identify interventions to address different priority risks, the facilitator asked the participants what the potential effects of different impacts. The participants would then suggest a number of impacts, sometimes in Palauan and sometimes in English, occasionally leading to a discussion about the right translation or the validity of the impact. The facilitator then made a suggestion of a summarising sentence in English. One discussion was how to translate the Palauan practice of *cherrakl*, which is a reciprocal system of working together. Even though *cherrakl* was mentioned in various potential impacts it was not included in the final policy version. The final result was then again transformed after the workshop by the facilitators into the table below for the final version of the policy.

| Sector | Priority Risks | Direct Impact | | | | |
|---|---|----------------|------------------------|------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------|
| | | Sea level rise | Extreme weather events | Rainfall regime change | Temperature regime change | Ocean acidification |
| Agriculture and Fisheries | 1. Salt water intrusion/inundation (particularly taro patches) | X | X | | | |
| | 2. Changes in fish movement and spawning seasons, negative impacts on marine species, & disruption to the food chain | | | | X | |
| | 3. Erosion/sedimentation and changes in water quality impacting agricultural and marine resources and food security | | X | X | | |
| Health | 1. Disruption of food supply/production systems, with increases in poor nutrition and non-communicable diseases (NCDs) | X | X | | | |
| | 2. Damage or destruction of infrastructure (water, sewage, power, health etc.), disruption in community health services | X | X | | | |
| | 3. Increases in water-borne and vector-borne diseases | | X | | | |
| Biodiversity Conservation & Natural Resources | 1. Decreased resilience of marine resources and coral reef systems | | | | | X |
| | 2. Destruction and transformation of forest ecosystems | | X | X | | |
| | 3. Coral bleaching and loss of vulnerable marine species and habitats | | | X | | |
| Society & Culture | 1. Negative impacts on traditional and subsistence food production | | X | | | |
| | 2. Disruption of social units (families, clans, communities, cheldebechel, etc.) | | X | | | |
| | 3. Changes in social behaviour and migration | | X | | | |

Figure 3: Priority Risks by Sector and Impact. The table shows ranking of risks by sectors and is the final version included in the policy document. Numbers indicate priority of risk. Impacts include Sea Level Rise, Extreme weather events, Rainfall regime change, Temperature regime change, Ocean acidification. (PCCP, 2015:14)

Through this action, there is a sort of transformation taking place steered by the facilitators, to conform the answers provided by the participants to “their own meanings

by working the new words into classifications they already knew" (Shore, Wright and Però, 2011:14) such as the classifications of the table in Figure 3. The content of the policy was in a sense "already known" (Riles, 2001:18) in other ways as well. 2015 was a busy year for Palau, for in addition to writing the PCCP and getting the Marine Sanctuary Bill approved, the country was preparing a number of other important documents. Some of these included the Intended Nationally Determined Contribution (INDC) and a national policy for food security. The INDC is a document that outlines the intended actions that a country aims to take under the Paris Agreement in order to reduce national greenhouse gas emissions, and it had to be submitted prior to the COP21 in December the same year. It was largely based on the creation of the climate change policy. In addition to this, the policy on food was being developed, also following the climate change policy in matters of concern. The climate change policy was therefore an important document with far-reaching societal impacts, laying the foundation for both the INDC and the food security policy. But the PCCP was also itself partly a result existing documents. The PCCP was in that regard part of a larger system of documents 'seen before':

The process to develop the Policy was built on existing initiatives through a sector-based consultation effort to provide a framework for a coordinated approach to building resilience to climate change and disasters and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The process builds upon earlier work, and has been defined and developed through:

- (a) initial assessments of vulnerability and levels of greenhouse gas emissions conducted to prepare the Palau Second National Communication to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change;
- (b) initial risk assessments undertaken to develop the Palau National Disaster Risk Management Framework 2010;
- (c) energy assessments undertaken as part of the process to develop the National Energy Policy (NEP) and the National Energy Efficiency Action Plan 2010;
- (d) sector risk and capacity assessments undertaken by sector working groups
- (e) national capacity assessments and definition of priority risks, gaps, and needs by the AdHoc Climate Change Committee and other stakeholders (PCCP, 2015:50)

The construction of PCCP as based on other documents presented as a visual model:

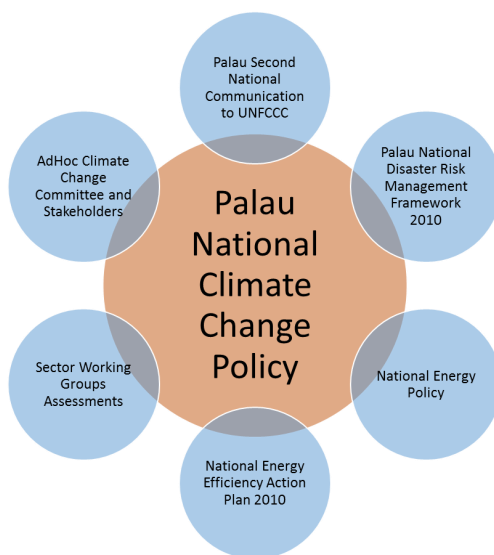


Figure 4: ‘Weaving’ of documents. The model shows how the PCCP made use of existing documents to create the needed content.

There is here “a layered form” (Riles 1998:379) within these documents that involves them being “weaved” (Riles 1998:381) together by borrowing information from each other, creating new patterns, but still mirroring each other in style or form. This process also includes, according to Riles, a layering of levels as well (“community, state, national, regional and international”). Parts of existing documents are incorporated into new documents, the information sometimes rephrased and reshaped, yet following a standardised familiar form. It is what makes up ‘the aesthetics of a document’ (Riles 2001), exemplified in Figure 4 by the flower-shaped form of the PCCP.

Apthorpe (1997:55) further argues that “policy statements depend on being plain”, which should be seen as attempts of presenting what should be perceived as ‘objective data’. According to Apthorpe, data is what after the process of transformation becomes diagrams and ‘measurable realities’ (1997:15): “... policy language presents policy as being data-driven ... By ‘data’ in policy and policy analysis is meant what is wanted and what can be handled, through measurement perhaps”. However, the use of certain ‘keywords’, such as *awareness* or *capacity* or even *climate change*, provides insights of ongoing discourses that are embedded in what is

conceived of as ‘neutral’ language. These keywords however, act as “mobilizing metaphors”, Shore and Wright (197:20) argue, as they transform rationality of governance itself into the documents. During the PCCP workshop, the participants were included in this transformation through creating vision statements for each sector. The vision statements represent an “institutionalised utopia” (Riles 2001:3) where change will come through policies, action plans and information. This is similar to what Apthorpe (1997:44) calls “goal language”:

A[n] ... example [of style] is goal language. Where the primary purpose of charters, constitutions and creeds is ideological, the first requirement is that they be in good form and style of goal language which inspires, persuades, gains support, defines parameters, gives a badge to wear.

The policy workshop participants were asked to come up with a vision for their sector relating to climate change. The facilitators mentioned several examples from similar vision statements from other existing documents to make it clearer for the participants to understand the exercise. At the society and culture sector workshop, an example from a *Gaps and Needs Workshop* in 2013 was mentioned: “Happy, healthy and resilient Palauan communities in a changing world”. Once the participants had understood the aim of the activity, they were asked to put up their hands if they came up with words that were suitable. The participants suggested a long list of words that were written down on a blackboard at the front of the room including words such as “clean”, “sustainable”, “pristine”, “safe”, “environmentally”, “responsive”, and “adaptive”. The facilitator then tried to put the words together into one sentence. If the sentence was too long or had words that had a somewhat overlapping meaning, the facilitator suggested a shorter version of the sentence. Sometimes, when participants could not agree, the exercise was left until the end of the workshop before coming back to it. The society and culture sector vision statement in its final form read as follows: “To conserve and protect the island nation and its communities from climate change and disaster impacts”.

The vision statements are great examples of how an ideal future should look like if the policy were to be successfully implemented on all accounts. As the vision statement above shows, it is a rather general goal to work towards and not very specific. The vision statements are as such something that has importance for the future of the

problem that the policy wishes to address, but that has yet to have happened, which constitutes an uncertain element of the policy. However, the vision words themselves will never be ‘tested’ or measured, as Apthorpe (1997:54) points out: “as a rule, they are not ever put to serious empirical tests – or if they are, and they fail, they continue to circulate in good currency nevertheless.” Hence, achieving a vision statement in its entirety might never happen and participants may be fully aware of this. Yet it expresses a goal to aim for, and through its experienced collaborative creation serves as a “mobilizing metaphor” for the participants from each sector. Whether or not it is achieved seems thus to be an accepted uncertainty, its purpose lies rather in its conceivable potential.

The climate change policy included other uncertain aspects as well, not only vision statements. This includes future projections from scientific climate models. During one working group session, after the consultant had screened a video clip that explained the scientific reasoning concerning anthropogenic climate change, she presented a list of ‘risks’ that was projected onto the large screen. The points included under ‘risks’ were: Sea level rise and storm surge, Temperatures, Rainfall, Seasons changing, Severe weather events, Ocean acidification, and Additional hazards. The aim was to imagine how these risks might affect various aspects within that sector and then to decide which ones were the three top priorities for that sector. Before the exercise started, the facilitator read each one of them aloud while the participants listened.

Every projected change was discussed collectively and participants gave suggestions of how they thought such a change would affect Palau. Arriving at the point about rainfall, the facilitator stated that Palau would get a lot more rain in the future, and encouraged the participants to think about how that would affect their sector. One of the participants then raised his hand and replied “But I thought Palau was supposed to have more drought in the future?” Having read the same thing in a report just days before, I was wondering about that myself. “No, they changed that now” the facilitator replied. “A new report came out just a few months ago and it now says that we are going to get a lot more rain. The last report was from 2012. This is from 2014”. Everybody seemed content with the answer and we continued on the list.

The relationship between science and policy is an emerging field of interest for anthropologists (see for example Lahsen 2010). The uncertainty aspect of scientific knowledge production is worthy of analysis on its own and goes beyond the realms of this study. Rather, I wish to highlight the workshop participants' reactions when the scientific projection of rain for Palau was changed. Or, perhaps it should rather be described as a 'lack' of reaction, as the facilitator's answer was seemingly accepted by the person who asked. Here, I refer to a point made by Brian Wynne (1992:282) about the reception of scientific knowledge, in that a 'lack' of reaction may not only be explained through trusting the advice and science as a method, but it also has to do with the social relationships and networks that the information comes from. Scientific representations gain strength through their intellectual frameworks and centralized formal nature, according to Wynne (1992:296).

Consequently, if reflecting around the roles of the facilitators at the PCCP workshop as having the correct knowledge based on their connection to the institutional bureaucracy and access to newest climate science, trust is put in them that they are right. This brings us to a final point of uncertainty from the workshop assessment, which includes the exercise of evaluating how much each of these calculated risks would cost to fix in the future. Leading us to the next section, an uncertain element of the policy also stems from being successful only *if* funds are granted from external donors.

“The Name of the Game: DIRECT ACCESS”

By the end of March 2015, after the ten sector workshops were completed, all of the participants from across all sectors gathered for one final two-day meeting. The aim of the National Consultative Workshop for the PCCP was twofold. Firstly, it presented a draft of the policy so that everyone who had provided information could review the draft and give their feedback. Secondly, the national workshop served as an opportunity to provide information about regional and international structures of climate change institutions that were important for Palau. The national workshop took place at one of the larger hotels in Koror, in a much bigger room than the previous sector workshops. At the front of the room stood a podium, with two large screens on each side. On the

screens and on banners around the room were the names and logos of the supporting agencies.⁵⁰ Sitting around the many tables in the room were all of the sector representatives and the facilitators who had attended the previous workshops, as well as representatives from ministries, students from the college, researchers, traditional leaders, and several consultants from some of the supporting agencies. President Remengesau officially opened the workshop through a speech in which he highlighted the importance of the policy for Palau's future.

During the two days, the national workshop participants discussed numerous topics related to climate change. This included presentations of other relevant policies (food security and energy), climate change and disability, climate change and youth, climate change and insurance, just to mention a few. Several presentations were addressing the regional and international structures for climate change, such as the UNFCCC and regional strategies and frameworks.⁵¹

One major issue for Palau and for many other countries in the Pacific region is the strong dependency on grants and external funding. The Climate Change Office is an example of an institution largely dependent on grants. According to the 5-Year Action Plan in the PCCP as of 2015, the expected total financial costs needed to effectuate the actions recognised by all sectors are USD 500 million. Much of this staggering sum of money will have to come through international agencies, such as the Green Climate Fund (GCF), the Adaptation Fund (AF), or the Global Environment Facility (GEF). This means that in order to obtain the financial resources for the various sectors' needs, they have to be applied for. This is not an easy process, which is why at the national workshop much of the time was spent on presentations that explained how to apply for funding. The best way, however, is accessing money directly without going through other agencies, or as one presenter said enthusiastically to the crowd:

⁵⁰ These included: The Pacific Community (SPC), the European Union-funded GCCA Pacific Small Islands States Project (GCCA: PSIS), Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), and United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

⁵¹ One example includes the Framework for Resilient Development in the Pacific (FRDP), which at the time of the national workshop in Palau in 2015 was being drafted. It provides a framework for how the region will approach issues of climate change and disasters, aligned with international agreements such as Paris Agreement, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction and the Sustainable Development Goals. It exemplifies the linkages and overlaps between regional and international approaches, foci and documents.

“What’s the name of the game?! Direct access!!” She then showed a slide of it, where the ‘ss’ in ‘access’ was swapped with ‘\$\$’, thereby reading ‘acce\$\$’.

‘Direct Access’ is an approach used by the Adaptation Fund that allows accredited National Implementing Entities (NIEs) to directly access financing of projects and manage its implementation and monitoring.⁵² In other words, only accredited Implementing Entities, either national, regional or multilateral, can apply for money from the Adaptation Fund for projects. Palau, at the point of the national workshop, did not have a National Implementing Entity at the time, but they wanted to establish one. In order to establish on, the government would have to make adjustments to governmental structures and other criteria included in the four categories used as evaluation standards by the Adaptation Fund.⁵³ Proposals to become a NIE have to be in accordance with the Adaptation Fund policies and guidelines. Furthermore, the climate change policy played a key role as a link between the financial institutions and as a measurement of having the right level of institutional capacity to become a NIE or another similar accreditation by other providers of financial support.

Within the anthropology of aid, there is much critical writing on how financial support is being provided to developing countries. One example is what Lie (2011; 2015) calls ‘developmentality’, a condition through which the receiving countries need to fulfil certain requirements in order to get the money. Developmentality stems from Foucault’s (1991) notion of governmentality, which is the power of institutions to govern objects and people. A similar thought is embedded in Lie’s concept of developmentality, but his focus is on development agencies such as the World Bank. He explains a paradox, which is that the World Bank wants their clients (in Lie’s case this is Uganda) to gain greater ownership to the process, however, they are also simultaneously demanding that the clients stick to the Bank’s “good governance policies” (201:4-6).

Similarly, one may say that the Adaptation Fund through its Direct Access mechanism pushes forward a desire for their entities to gain easier access to the funding

⁵² <https://www.adaptation-fund.org/about/direct-access/>

⁵³ The four categories that the Adaptation Fund use to evaluate potential accreditation of new entities are legal status, financial and management integrity, institutional capacity, and transparency, self-investigation and anti-corruption. Available at: <https://www.adaptation-fund.org/apply-funding/accreditation/>. Accessed 29.06.2018.

so that they can manage the funds and the project themselves. However, they still have to comply with the Adaptation Fund policies and guidelines in achieving a successful score in the four categories used to measure conformity. Shore and Wright (2011:20) argue that such audit and accountability measurements are results of neoliberal governmentality that “expect individuals’ motivations to align with the performance requirements of their institutions”. A problem of this, as Shore and Wright (2011:21) further point out, is that there is a “growing disparity between bureaucratic reporting and actual practice”. This then brings me to my final point, which also refers back to the beginning of this chapter, and the question of looking for climate change – but now within documents.

Connecting dots (and levels)

“So you wanna try to connect the dots?” he asked me. I was having dinner with one of the persons in charge of creating the Palau Climate Change Policy a year after the national workshop, in August 2016. The policy had already been approved and it was now time for its official launch the following day. He was responding to a question I had asked him earlier about how the policy connects to different levels and why it is important. He explained:

So, what gets agreed at the international level decides if we become beneficiaries or not, and this creates the framework basically. We say “We want to do *this*” then we wait and see what they have. Then entities come in and say “Here’s what you want”. And this is both good and bad: some say it’s prescriptive, even if it’s country-driven. It really depends on who comes in (the agencies). Many depend on these for a living. They’re sort of like salesmen who have a sales pitch. From January to now, we had four!

What he refers to here are the different agencies that come to Palau to suggest a climate change related project or programme. He then listed the ones that had been to Palau recently and that had held workshops. The list ranged from disaster management to project proposal writing. That led us to talking about the climate change policy:

So the approach of the policy is like this: We get a concept note from a sector. It gets submitted to the climate change office. We check if it is in line with the policy. If yes, it gets sent to the climate change management office. If yes, it moves to NEPC [National Environmental Protection Council]. If no, they give it back. If yes, it goes to national endorsement. Then either CROP agencies, or bilateral, or multilevel like GCF. So the Concept Note needs to meet certain informational criteria. We are using the GIZ template. If it is accepted by funder then it goes to Product Design Documents (PDD).

We use the LFA approach [Logical Framework Approach] to connect the dots. The office of project management is not populated at the moment so they assigned it to us. So I have four hats. That's me.

The PCCP in other words sets in motion a range of ways of connecting “dots”, or rather, documents. The policy is here a starting point that allows people from the sectors to send suggestions of initiatives to address climate change related issues to the Climate Change Office. The suggestions have to be stated in the form of a concept note, which is a standard developed by the German agency GIZ. If it contains the necessary information requirements, the concept note is sent for approval. If the suggestion is successful in being accepted for funding, it moves to the next stage of Product Design Documents (PDD). This involves describing the project in writing so that it complies with PDD information criteria developed by the UN. For implementation and monitoring of the project, the Logical Framework Approach is used. This is a USAID developed method, widely in use by government and non-governmental organisations since the 1970s.

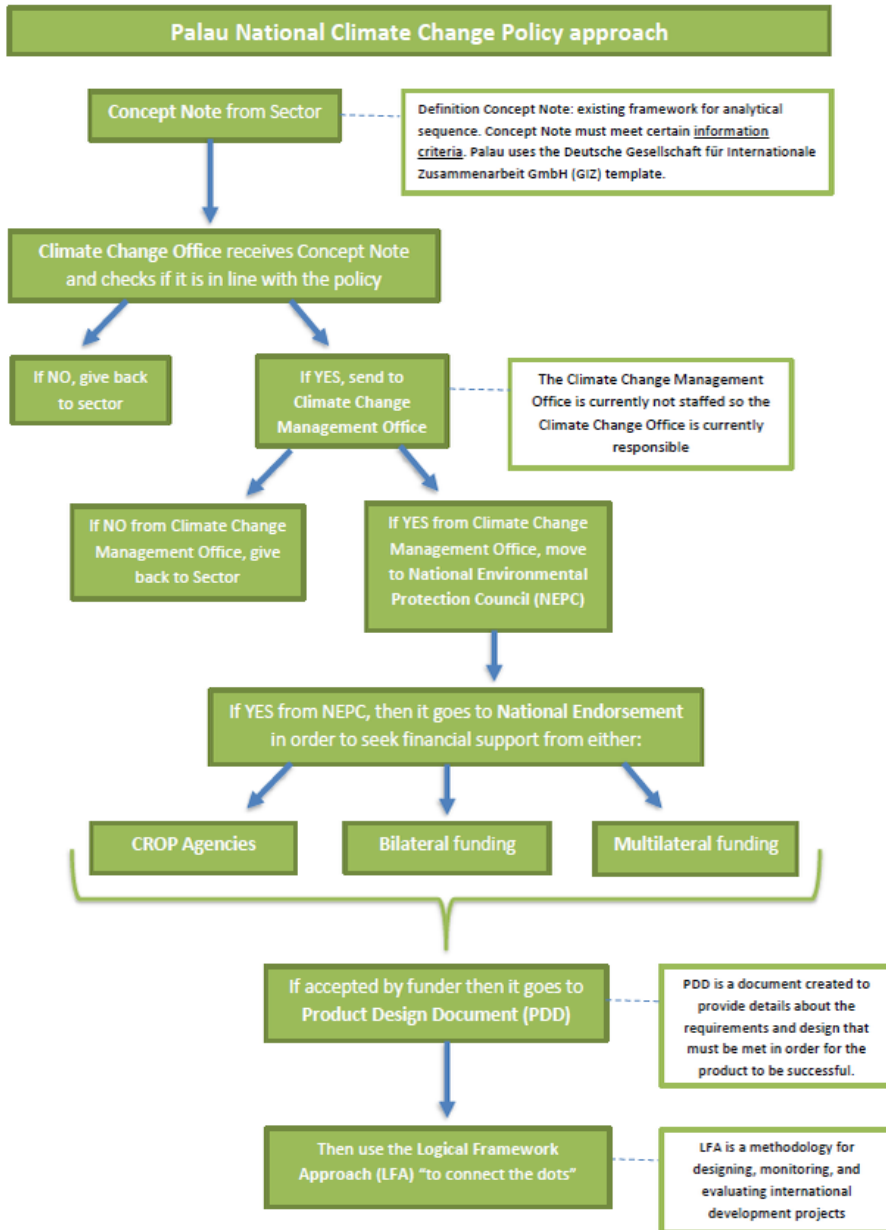


Figure 5: Connecting the PCCP dots. This model shows the line of procedures for a project suggestion by someone from the sectors under the PCCP, as described by my interlocutor. It shows how the PCCP at the top initiates the creation of documents that must apply to certain document standards in order to get to the next level. The level of approval further initiates the creation of new documents that require new standards, which finally leads to the LFA that guides the design, monitoring and evaluation of the project (including project activities, outputs, purpose and goal). When implemented, the project follows these guidelines and produces the necessary outputs and reports that are then sent to the donor containing the desired information.

The consequence

Similar to the Marine Sanctuary Act, the PCCP also serves both an inward and outward purpose, but in a different way. The PCCP rather acts as an initiating mechanism that provides access to international funding. As such, it is more institutional and they serve a more instrumental role. The consequence of this is that it allows for certain deculturalising methods by means of channelling information about climate change *from* Palau *to* others. This is partly a consequence of having to comply with a range of document standards. These standards reflect the ‘manageable realities’ (Green, 2003:124) that institutions involved in trying to ‘fix’ climate change challenges (meaning other countries, institutions, or organisations) rely on in gaining an understanding of the climate change issues at hand. I argue that this raises doubts about obtaining an in-depth understanding of what clearly is a complex multifaceted issue through the practice of such ‘knowledge management’.

Workshops thereby become the social space in which climate change is envisioned in its documentation form, where people’s thoughts and experiences of climate change are transformed into particular document standards in order to meet criteria of aesthetics. In this transformation of responses and information in a workshop setting, multifaceted realities are made into simplistic strategies, as explained by Green (2011:326):

The analytical constraints of the logical framework and the ‘problem tree’ in demanding simplistic causal hierarchies produce simplistic strategies to address complex multifaceted realities. This limitation is not perceived as a problem in the workshop setting because what matters, to facilitators and participants alike, is what is made to matter by the constitution of projects as outputs to be managed.

In ways similar to how scientific diagrams provide information about risks and adaptation, insights into how climate change related issues have an impact on Palauans’ lives are put into matching diagrams and output reports. These documents travel across countries and regions as they are sent back and forth to and from donors, but thereby also importantly serving as one of the primary sources of information for many decision makers around the world. Barnett and Campbell (2010:176-177) have raised similar concerns through what they labelled as “inside and outside knowledges”:

the great majority of global research projects that deal with climate change are poorly informed about the materialities of Pacific Island environments and the lives of their inhabitants. This is a function of the commitment of researchers to modelling approaches, which rarely include data about local conditions, let alone qualitative information about factors such as land tenure, kinship, culture and livelihoods, which are critical to understanding the risks climate change poses to people in the region, and their capacity to adapt. Such approaches privilege expert knowledge about environmental systems, and eschew local knowledge about social and ecological context. As a result, assumptions are made about Pacific Islands and their communities that often homogenize and misrepresent them. These projects give rise to suggestions about adaptive actions – such as the building of sea-walls, or the relocation of communities – when there has been precious little research on what kinds of adaptation are appropriate, culturally and socially acceptable, and likely to be effective.

Drawing on the globalised models of knowledge developed in geography, Hulme warns against the dangers of using approaches that front universal standards. He argues that the problem of ‘global kinds of knowledge’ such as climate models brings with it limitations of “thinking in flattening ways” (2010c:563). One example of this includes my own expectations when arriving in Palau and ‘looking for climate change’. I was perhaps expecting to recognise climate change in a certain manner, influenced by the scientific reports I had read before coming to Palau. This leads to the question – how does one expect to ‘see’ or experience climate change? If connected to policy or outputs, climate change impacts are presented or recognised in prescriptive ways. Yet, the reality is much more complex. As Barnett and Campbell point out in the quote above, and as seen in the cases explored in this chapter, the reality for Pacific Islanders includes factors such as kinship, land tenure, and culture.

Similarly, and in line with Barnett and Campbell, Hulme (2010c:559) notes that knowledge about global environmental change has been subject to a downplaying of cultural differences, as well as ignoring spatial relationships of power:

Global kinds of knowledge yield global kinds of meaning-making and policy-making. They erase cultural differentiation and heterogeneity. They fail to do justice to the plurality of human living and may have considerably less purchase in problem-solving and policy-making than a multiplicity of local and diverse tools and indicators (Hulme 2010c:563).

The focus, he argues, should rather be on understanding how knowledge can change as well as its institutional practices. Hulme points out a paradox, where in order to understand global environmental change, one must focus rather on plurality of meanings and embedded differences. The consequence for not understanding the

complexities and multifaceted challenges of climate change can, according to Hulme (2010c:563), give policy makers a false impression that these impacts are simple and easy to identify. By standardising and transforming information about social and cultural contexts through workshops and in documents, an abatement of complexities is sustained.

Through the various documents that are generated from, or with reference to, climate change related projects or policies in Palau, such differences and meanings are ‘flattened’ through standardised methods that transforms knowledge. However, it might not have been experienced as a homogenizing approach by many of the participants who participated in the workshops. Quite to the contrary, the feedback given by many participants to the facilitators was that they were proud of having been part of the process. By participants, the PCCP was referred to as “our policy”, at least according to some of the facilitators. One of them explained to me that this was because the participants felt that they personally had participated through sharing their knowledge, and that therefore they wanted to see it in its final form. For many of the participants, this had been one of the most comprehensive policy making processes ever carried out in Palau, because it involved over a hundred people from the “sectors”. Through this approach a sense of collective effort was also highlighted as an important factor of calling it “our policy”.

In order to explain this while making my final point, I turn to the importance of the relational to show that there might be other outcomes of the policy process that can highlight the importance of such participation. In David Mosse’s analysis of a development project in India, he shows how the participants rather measured success of the project through social relationships:

What was conveyed through our project impact surveys as most important to these people, was not what we (project workers) looked for in terms of our indicators (the spread of new varieties or loan repayment rates) but rather changed or new social relationships, not least relationships with project outsiders or the state, or banks; and the patronage or protection, the resources or the advancement these offered. Development knowledge was significant not instrumentally but *relationally*, and not for the local autonomy it fostered, but for the *connections* that it allowed. (original emphasis, 2014:516)

Mosse argues that there is too much focus on development projects as institutional and technical, and that too little attention has been given to the relational aspect of

knowledge that plays out in, for example, a workshop setting. He argues that “policy knowledge is interstitial” (2014:519), and highlights that policies are ways of creating relationships of cooperation.

In the case of the PCCP, the policy extends both outwards and inwards: it serves as a link to the international, as well as having engaged a large number of Palauans in the creation process. By having participated in this process, the participants have developed a relationship to the policy through obtaining knowledge *about it* as well as providing *to it*. Comparing this with the Marine Sanctuary Act, Palauans expressed discontent with it a year later, perhaps because they felt a sense of disconnect with it. The PCCP, on the other hand, shows that creating a sense of being in a “knowledge-relationship” (Mosse, 2014:513) may instead produce sensations of ownership among the participants. It highlights the significance of relational dimensions and being able to provide what for the participants is considered to be valuable knowledge. Even if a process of transformation takes place while sharing.

The next chapter will expand the scale of analysis to examine how representatives of the Pacific Islands region are using vernacular models of similar ‘knowledge-relationships’ in developing a Pacific form of global climate change diplomacy.

Chapter 6

Crossroads: Regionalism, Leadership and Creating the Relation

Introduction

In this chapter, I turn my attention to the Pacific region as a whole. In 2013, former Papua New Guinean Prime Minister Sir Mekere Morauta stated that Pacific countries found themselves “at the crossroads” with regard to existing regional architecture and to finding a Pacific strategy for the future (MacLellon, 2015:2). Climate change has in recent years played a concomitant part in the transformation of regional structures and developments of a global Pacific position-making. This chapter therefore sets out to describe and analyse some of the strategies taken forward by the Pacific region, drawing on actions and political developments on the global climate change scene of recent years. Based on my fieldwork at regional meetings, academic conferences and United Nations conferences, this chapter will explore strategies expressed by Pacific leaders and academics in terms of how the Pacific Islands region aims to take on greater leadership roles. This global positioning of the Pacific in climate change politics is part of the development of a specific repertoire of Pacific climate diplomacy (for an overview, see Fry and Tarte 2015).

The complex and multifaceted system that comprises the international climate regime has often been found confusing, and many Pacific Islanders are therefore, as a response, voicing a desire for more Pacific-led approaches. This has further led to the growth of a more regionally unified voice from Pacific countries and attempts to change the global narrative about Pacific Islanders as victims of climate change. Pacific people are thereby attempting to change the way others may perceive and speak about the Pacific Islands, as well as gaining an authority that allows them to speak out and be heard globally. Such desires are particularly apparent in the widespread Pacific aim (expressed by several countries) to be ‘Climate Leaders’. In this process, Pacific countries and leaders set examples for other nations, as exemplified through Palau’s

efforts in Chapter 4. This kind of leadership is also found through numerous regional declarations, of which the Pacific Islands Forum's Majuro Declaration for Climate Leadership (2013) explicitly states that the Pacific signatories "commit to be Climate Leaders". As a consequence, climate change has brought to light issues of differences with other Pacific Rim countries, such as Australia. It is becoming increasingly more important for Pacific countries to develop a relation of understanding with others through which Pacific experiences of facing and knowing climate change can be told and shared. That is why, as this chapter aims to show, regionalism and diplomacy stand out as fruitful areas for examination, as these are the primary means to maintain and develop cross-regional and international relations.

The convoluted field of climate change

I wish to start by presenting some of the challenges for the Pacific region in what former Minister Tony deBrum described as the "confused and convoluted" field of climate change. In order to do so, I go back to the second day of my PhD studies in 2013, when I suddenly found myself headed towards Honolulu to attend a conference, "Waves of Change: Climate Change in the Pacific Islands and Implications for Hawai'i", held at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. Attending the conference was a wide range of speakers, including ambassadors, ministers, academics, students, NGO representatives, and more. People from across the Pacific had in other words come together to discuss in detail the expected impacts that climate change will have on Pacific Islanders.

On the opening day, Tony deBrum, who at the time served as Minister in Assistance to the President of the Republic of the Marshall Islands (and later Minister of Foreign Affairs), gave a powerful keynote. In describing what he started by calling "the nature of the climate change beast", he explained a situation characterised by a strong disconnect between international debates and the shorelines of Pacific islands, mainly because of the confusing and convoluted interactions among countries:

When the world first focused on the climate in the Rio 1 meeting in 1992, climate change was just gaining momentum as an international debating subject of choice. But so little had changed since that first Rio conference that during last year's Rio +20 conference, our President Christopher Loeak, in his convention intervention used exactly the same opening paragraph that our first President Amata Kabua used in his speech at the first Rio. 20 years has passed, and the world seems to have stopped its

course in climate change quicksand that allowed for a lot of rhetoric and debate, but very little in terms of actual movement for environmental protection, adaptation and mitigation.

Yes, a lot of large international conferences have taken place, including workshops and retreats, exchanges of ideas, by and among the best in the science. Debates about whether or not climate change was happening, and if it was anthropogenic or not. UNFCCC along with a multitude of similarly unpronounceable acronyms have numerous meetings and consultations where the most diverse and remarkable points of views were exchanged and discussed. ... The integration of conservation, energy, environmental science, has resulted in a new and exciting field of expertise, interspersed with community, and traditional knowledge and wisdom. *Yet, so confused and convoluted is the field out there that it is argued one needs extensive training and experience to be able to understand it in its bundled form.* There are so many focal points out there that you need a focal point for the focal points.

From January 2012 to March 2013, the Marshall Islands has participated in at least a dozen UN sponsored climate change affairs including a presidential speech at the United Nations. ... The Kyoto Protocol, the Durban Platform for Enhanced Actions, and numerous other international agreements and sub-agreements have become the climate change bibles for progress. And yet, in the midst of all these remarkable signs of progress and understanding, *very little meaningful considerable progress and understanding is taking place at sea level* (my emphasis, deBrum 2013).

The concerns raised here by Minister deBrum reflect a discontent with what appears to be a gap between the ongoing debates in the UN and internationally, and the perceived situation on the ground in Pacific Islands. He describes a situation where Pacific Islanders are seeing little of the results of international discussions even though the physical impacts of climate change are already very much visible. "Islands are disappearing" Minister deBrum continued, "It is not something which is happening in the future - it is happening now".

He depicts a daunting circumstance where participation in numerous UN climate change arenas has given few results, and where the production of documents has become signifiers of what progress is, rather than focusing on what he calls "considerable progress and understanding ... at sea level". He thereby points to what seems to be a gap between these levels, characterised by differing perceptions of what progress is and over-complicated forms of interaction and knowledge-sharing. In the following sections I wish to provide further exploration of these challenges and to highlight some of the suggested ways to overcome them. In order to so, I begin by

drawing on some of the important post-colonial political developments in the Pacific region.

Post-independence Pacific regionalism

As described in detail in Chapter 4 for historical developments in Palau, the Pacific region has a long history of colonialization and large-scale transformations of society, culture and economy. Entering the period of World War II and after, the region slowly began to transform as countries were gaining their independence and new regional formations were established that are still important today. One of the earliest examples is the South Pacific Commission, now called the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC), formed in 1947 by Australia, France, New Zealand, Netherlands, United Kingdom and United States. It was established to create stability after World War II. Today its role is to provide scientific and technical support to the entire Pacific region. The SPC now consists of 26 members, of which 22 are Pacific countries and territories, as well as Australia, France, New Zealand and United States.

In the decades following World War II and entering the 1960s and 1970s, many Pacific countries were in the process of becoming independent, with Samoa being the first to gain its independence from New Zealand in 1962. There were strong ongoing forces that wanted self-determination and Pacific Islanders were voicing concerns against nuclear and other environmental and political issues, as shown in Chapter 4 with regards to Palau (see also Fry 2015). In 1968, the University of South Pacific (USP) was established and reflected what Epli Hau'ofa (1998:394) called a "microcosm of the region" in underlining its importance in developing a sense of regional identity and a 'Pacific Way' (see also Crocombe 1976; Lawson 2010). This has had its challenges in the Pacific region, particularly influenced by the cultural and linguistic fragmentation of many countries such as Solomon Islands or Vanuatu (Wesley-Smith, 2007:35).⁵⁴ Nevertheless, on issues concerning nuclear testing, as well as commitments to sustainable development and environmental concerns, there has historically been a broad regional recognition of importance (Barnett and Campbell,

⁵⁴ Ratios of languages to population are extraordinary: In Solomon Islands there are over 80 different languages and a population of about 600,000, while in Vanuatu there are over 100 languages and a population of about 240,000.

2010:42-43). The growth of regional, intergovernmental organisations has played a significant role in this.

In 1971 another important regional political organisation was established, initially called the South Pacific Forum, but later renamed the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF). The change of name reflects larger ongoing attempts to incorporate countries north of the Equator, as well as moving away from the perceived colonial notion of the South Seas (see Hau'ofa 1998). The aim of PIF was to be the voice of Pacific countries to the world and to secure a Pacific regional diplomacy (Fry and Tarte, 2015:5). PIF currently consists of 18 member states.⁵⁵ It also includes a range of Forum Observers and Associate Members⁵⁶, as well as EU, France, Italy, and United Kingdom as Dialogue Partners. The Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS) is also the chair of the Council of Regional Organisations in the Pacific (CROP), which consists of fourteen regional organisations.⁵⁷ Other regional organisations that have played an important role for Pacific countries include the Forum Fisheries Agency established in 1979, the South Pacific Regional Environment Program (SPREP) formed in 1982, as well as sub-regional groupings such as the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG) formed in 1988. During the PIF leaders meeting in 2005, a special recognition was further given to Smaller Island States as another subregional group.⁵⁸ These regional organisations are attempts to establish and develop a stronger voice internationally (Larmour, 2012:10). Most Pacific countries are furthermore part of other subregional groups in larger organisations such as Asian Development Bank, Commonwealth, or ACP Group (EU).⁵⁹

Aspirations for independence for many Pacific countries during the 1970s and 80s did not however succeed as planned. Instead, political leadership was more

⁵⁵ Member states: Australia, Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, New Zealand, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Marshall Islands, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu.

⁵⁶ These include: Asian Development Bank, Commonwealth of Nations, WCPFC, World Bank, and Overseas Countries and Territories (OCTs): Tokelau, American Samoa, Timor Leste, Guam, Northern Mariana Islands, and Wallis and Futuna.

⁵⁷ Fiji School of Medicine (FSMed), Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA), Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery (GFDRR), National Environment Service (NES), Pacific Aviation Safety Office (PASO), Pacific Financial Technical Assistance Centre (PFTAC), Pacific Islands Development Programme (PIDP), Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS), Pacific Power Association (PPA), Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP), South Pacific Tourism Organisation (SPTO), Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and the University of the South Pacific (USP).

⁵⁸ The Smaller Islands States Unit within the Pacific Islands Forum comprises Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru, Niue, Palau and Tuvalu.

See: <http://www.forumsec.org/pages.cfm/strategic-partnerships-coordination/smaller-island-states/>

⁵⁹ The African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States (ACP).

concerned with focusing on securing financial aid and dealing with having limited resources (Hau'ofa, 1994:150). Views have since been expressed by major Pacific rim countries, and Australia in particular, that Pacific countries are “failed” states because of instability and violent events in the decades after becoming independent (Jolly, 2007:528; Wesley-Smith, 2007:39-40). Hau'ofa (1994) argued that this has furthered a belittling view among those who have questioned Pacific peoples' capability to survive without the help of others. This belittlement involves being considered as “too small, too poorly endowed with resources, and too isolated from the centers of economic growth for their inhabitants ever to be able to rise above their present condition of dependence on the largesse of wealthy nations” (Hau'ofa, 1994:150).

The categorisation of Pacific Islanders by others goes back to the early European explorers who categorised and defined Pacific peoples into perceived “races” and “culture areas” based on their own impressions (Jolly 2007:516). One of the most obvious ways in which such ideas are still visible is the sub-regional division of Micronesia, Melanesia and Polynesia, created from imagined boundaries and people ‘who resembled each other’ (Jolly, 2007:516). According to Paul D’Arcy (2006:8), this division is attributed to the nineteenth-century explorer Dumont d’Urville who categorised the cultural regions through racial stereotypes. The regional groupings were therefore initially based on “racial and cultural typologies that... formed imagined boundaries” according to Margaret Jolly (2007:516). Even though such representations have been contested and opposed (see for example Sahlins 2000; Douglas 1979), it has been suggested that they have in many ways been internalised by Pacific Islanders themselves and are therefore still being used today (Hau’ofa 1994), as we can see from groups like *Melanesian Spearhead Group* (MSG), the *Polynesian Leaders Group*, *Micronesian Chief Executive Summit*, and others.

In recent years, regional configurations and affiliations are seen to be moving away from some of the long-term relationships, towards the establishment of new collaborations. Climate change has become a catalyst for these developments as Pacific countries are making it increasingly clear that the impacts of climate change now and in the future are considered non-negotiable. Climate change has become a common cause for Pacific Islands, as well as a deal breaker in conversations and negotiations

with the historically influential neighbours Australia and New Zealand, as the next section will show.

Developing a Pan-Pacific architecture

This expanded Oceania is a world of social networks that crisscross the ocean all the way from Australia and New Zealand in the southwest, to the United States and Canada in the northeast. It is a world that we have created largely through our own efforts, and have kept vibrant and independent of the Pacific Islands world of official diplomacy and neocolonial dependency. In portraying this new Oceania I wanted to raise, especially among our emerging generations, the kind of consciousness that would help free us from the prevailing, externally generated definitions of our past, present, and future (Hau'ofa, 1998:392).

Hau'ofa expressed a strong desire for Pacific countries to 'break free' from previous relations with non-Pacific countries which he calls derogatory and belittling (Hau'ofa 1994:149). His vision was one where the countries were connected by the vast ocean, creating a 'new Oceania' as a basis for a Pacific identity and regionalism. Although a powerful vision, Hau'ofa's 'Sea of Islands' has also been critiqued for not offering particular ways of addressing contemporary problems such as rural poverty and marginalisation (D'Arcy, 2006:167). And one of the most pressing issues facing Pacific countries today is that of climate change, which has rapidly led to changes in regional architectures and narratives surrounding Pacific Islanders and their islands and ocean. Recalling the challenges sketched out at the beginning of the chapter by Minister deBrum, little has been done until recently at the international level in terms of addressing highly pressing contemporary issues. Recent years have, however, been somewhat of a "crossroad", as argued by former PNG Prime Minister Sir Mekere Morauta's, in which regional attempts to 'break free' from previous relations have manifested themselves.

Morauta's statement was said in relation to the 2013 review of the *Pacific Plan for Strengthening Regional Cooperation and Integration*, an ambitious framework that was endorsed in 2005 at a PIF meeting in Port Moresby. One of the main ideas in the Pacific Plan was to promote a greater sense of regionalism as a response to social, economic and political challenges and provide a strategy for the future. Although there was a hope that it would provide a "pragmatic framework" for a 'Pacific Way'

(O'Connor, 2013:5), it lacked concrete approaches and instead epitomised more of a 'Pacific vision'. Even though climate change was not specifically included in the Pacific Plan until 2009, sustainable development has been an important focus and was included in the 2005 version as one of the plan's four pillars (see Slatter 2015). PIF has in the last decades played an important role in facilitating discussions for members surrounding climate change, and in 2005, the Forum endorsed the Pacific Islands Framework for Action on Climate Change (PIFACC). This includes a Pacific Climate Change Round Table that oversees PIFACC's actions. During the 2008 Forum leaders meeting, the Niue Declaration on Climate Change⁶⁰ was also adopted (and endorsed by Australia and New Zealand), clearly stating grave concerns by Pacific Islands about climate change.

In the 2013 review of the Pacific Plan, emphasis is given to the ambition of 'regionalisation', rather than to concrete strategies for development (Borrevis et al., 2014:28). This move towards political development points to a direction of enabling self-governing processes in the region (Borrevis et al 2014; O'Connor 2013). The 2013 review has been an opportunity for the region to "imagine a future desired by Pacific Island people" as argued by Claire Slatter (2015:50), and to create an "authentically Islander-centred development framework". The review therefore pushes for "regionalism more than ever before" as stated by Prime Minister Morauta (2013), also calling it "game-changing" for the future of the Pacific region as it wants a restructuring of Pacific relations with donors.

The renewed Pacific plan was endorsed during a PIF meeting in Palau 2014, and became the *Framework for Pacific Regionalism*. Climate change was not particularly elaborated on in the new framework although it is highlighted as priority and core concern. Climate change is, however, clearly stated as top priority in the *Majuro Declaration for Climate Leadership*, which was endorsed at the 44th PIF Summit in 2013, at the same meeting where the Pacific Plan review was presented. Seen in

⁶⁰ The positions that are expressed in the Niue Declaration are of 'deep concern' over economic, social, cultural and environmental threats caused by climate change. It also states the experienced injustice felt because they are the least contributing countries, yet they suffer the most. It also states the importance of Pacific's social and cultural identity and that they wish to continue living there. Finally, it calls on foreign partners for assistance, both financially and technically, as well as mitigate their own emissions.

conjunction with the new framework for regionalism, these documents have been important factors in shaping Pacific action on climate change.

Fry and Tarte (2015) have argued that the greatest disruption of old regional architectures was when Fiji was suspended from the Pacific Islands Forum in 2009 after failing to hold democratic elections. Fiji has had four coups d'état in the last three decades, and after the last in 2009, Australia in particular took a hard stand leading to Fiji's suspension from PIF. Fry and Tarte (2015:5-6) trace what they call a 'fundamental shift' in Pacific Islands regional and global political interactions back to 2009, in connection with Fiji's suspension from PIF. At the time, both Australia and New Zealand still upheld sanctions against Fiji, and relations did not see any improvement after Fiji expelled Australia's Acting High Commissioner in 2010 (Caldwell 2010). Fiji's actions reflect a desire to create distance from previous relations or establishments, and the Bainimarama Government became increasingly outspoken about creating a new kind of 'network diplomacy' reflecting a 'paradigm shift' (Fry and Tarte, 2015:3-6). This new network would encourage south-south operation, with Fiji leading the way for the Pacific region, and was initially envisaged to include civil society, private sector, agencies, territories and others. Bainimarama has explicitly said that he will not join PIF again unless New Zealand and Australia leave the forum (MacLellan, 2015:3), thereby underlining a turn to a more "island centred regionalism" (MacLellan, 2015:4).

One of the most immediate outcomes of this process is the establishment in 2013 of the Pacific Islands Development Forum (PIDF) (see Tarte 2015), a new Fiji-led regional forum that excluded Australia and New Zealand. The aim of PIDF is to create and strengthen a Pacific-wide network focused on partnerships, diplomacy and self-governance, while being a champion organisation for sustainable development and climate change through green/blue growth (Fry and Tarte, 2015:8). Climate change has indeed been a main concern for PIDF, and for their Third Summit in Suva 2015, climate change was the overarching theme. During this summit, the Pacific participants expressed their concerns and demands for the upcoming COP21 meeting in Paris, and the result was the *Suva Declaration on Climate Change* (2015). The summit discussions included civil society, private sector and governments, in strong contrast

to other regional meetings, and the summit was described by one Pacific negotiator as “a unique opportunity for governments to discuss a major issue without the undue influence of the metropolitan powers from the developed world” (Kumar, 2016:3). The meeting also “instilled a greater sense of togetherness” among the participants, as key issues were agreed on through a more integrated approach (Kumar, 2016:3). PIDF has also played an important role in forging the *Pacific Climate Treaty* by 14 Pacific member states which in effect is the world’s first international treaty that bans fossil fuels (Slezak 2016).

In this context, differing perspectives, especially concerning coal, have led Australia in particular to distance itself in recent years from the strong calls on climate change voiced by Pacific countries (see Barnett and Campbell, 2010:106-108; Fry 2015). In preparation for the 2015 COP meeting, there were strong disagreements between Pacific countries on one side and Australia and New Zealand on the other over a 1.5 or 2 degree target in what was envisaged as the outcome agreement. Ahead of the 2015 Pacific Forum leaders meeting, Pacific concerns were raised about Australia and New Zealand’s negotiation strategy of having an aim of no less than 2 degrees. Former President of Kiribati, Anote Tong, told the press that either Australia leave the Forum or the six members of the Forum's Smaller Island States (SIS) group would exit their Forum membership (Mou 2015).

Although the ultimatum did not play out, it illustrates a contentious cause and genuine concern among Pacific leaders to gain greater control over issues that directly affect them and are of strategic concern (Fry, 2015:1). In 2018, the relationship between Pacific countries and Australia has continued being arduous due to governmental restructurings in Australia and a new leadership that has expressed climate change scepticism. As an example, Australia was accused of trying to “water down” climate change commitments included in the recent *Boe Declaration on Regional Security* (2018), created at the PIF meeting September 2018 (Lyons and Doherty 2018). New Zealand on the other hand, has since 2017 when a new government was put in place under Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern, taken a much more Pacific-focused approach. This includes a significant increase in New Zealand’s climate finance commitment to

Pacific countries and a “re-energized Pacific strategy” called Pacific Reset that aims to strengthen New Zealand’s and Pacific island nations’ relationship (Peters 2018).

Climate change is proving to be a deal breaker (and even a ‘deal maker’ considering New Zealand’s re-envisioned Pacific strategy), which is not just about a desire for self-governance, but it reflects ideas about the future living in a world where physical impacts of climate change are increasing. In the words of Fry and Tarte (2015:13):

Climate change has become the nuclear testing issue of the 21st century. ... Where the Pacific states might in the past have tolerated some frustration with the domination of the regional agenda in the PIF by Canberra and Wellington — to pursue the War on Terror or to promote a regional neoliberal economic order — this tolerance may have reached its limit on the climate change issue.

PIDF was, however, not the first regional organisation clearly stating a new way forward focusing on sustainable development and blue/green economic growth. In 2012, the *Melanesian Spearhead Group Declaration on Environment and Climate Change* was endorsed, focusing on a blue/green economy particularly for Melanesian countries. It also marks a more ‘activist’ Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG), clearly driven by climate change (Tarte, 2014:313). In a statement on behalf of the MSG Secretariat at the Rio+20 conference in Rio de Janeiro, former Prime Minister of Vanuatu, Hon. Meltek Sato Kilman, underlined the need for sustainable economic growth tied together with very distinct and unique challenges because of climate change. Such challenges, however, may also provide a basis for opportunity, as explained by Kilman at the MSG Leaders’ Summit (Kilman, 2012:3):

Climate change while presenting MSG members with unique challenges, also has provided an opportunity for us to rethink how we deal with the challenges of managing our natural resources in a time when demand for economic growth drives out national agendas. Although each of the MSG countries has continued to implement climate change policy at national level which has to some extent influenced environmental outcomes, we also have acknowledged the opportunity to undertake a sub-regional approach on common Melanesian challenges.

The opportunities that former Prime Minister Kilman here speaks of, are reflected in MSG’s establishment of a number of other initiatives. These include: the *Framework for Green Growth*, which provides the basis for all future development in Melanesia as it focuses on economic growth and protecting sustainable use of their natural resources;

the *Melanesia Blue Carbon Initiative* as a strategy to conserve and manage the resources found in mangrove, seagrass and coastal swamp areas, and; the *Melanesia Terrestrial Commitment* which provides support for terrestrial areas. Such initiatives reflect a desire among Pacific countries to take matters into their own hands and is therefore an opportunity to show powerful agency despite facing challenges, as described by former Prime Minister Kilman:

While richer nations can try to ‘buy’ protection in the form of engineered solutions, people in developing countries like us in Melanesia who are bearing the brunt of the impacts need a proven, accessible and affordable option. Prevention is always cheaper than cure, a part of this commitment is to adopt nature-based solutions as climate change mitigation and adaptation measures (Kilman, 2012:4).

According to Maclellan (2015:2) in his analysis of the transformation of Pacific regional architecture, there is an increased concern that the development approaches regionally are too bureaucratic. He notes that the “mood for reform is underpinned by concern that regional frameworks are dominated by donors and technocrats, rather than national governments” (2015:2). The previous chapter exemplifies some of the long bureaucratic process linked between national, regional and multilateral procedures that Pacific countries are faced with. Such a bureaucratic development, Maclellan (2015) observes, is in stark contrast to how Pacific leaders pushed hard towards self-determination and nuclear testings during the 1970s. What we are witnessing today in discourses and actions concerning climate change in the Pacific reflects another push, which may also in part be a response to technocratic-heavy processes as highlighted by deBrum in the beginning of the chapter. Shown through statements and initiatives by MSG, the creation of the PIDF and a disruption and remaking of more Pan-Pacific architectures, climate change challenges as perceived and interpreted by Pacific countries are pushed into the centre of regional and global agendas.

Changing narratives about the Pacific region

Parallel to the writing of declarations, the establishment of new regional organisations, and a political desire of greater ‘togetherness’, there have been ongoing attempts to challenge and change the discursive narrative about Pacific islanders, as discussed in Chapter 3. Looking back at the last two decades there has been a strong focus on

migration as a strategy for Pacific countries (see Morteux and Barnett 2008; Risse 2009) and discussions about Pacific islanders being climate refugees or tragic victims (see Kempf 2009; McNamara and Gibson 2009; Henry and Jeffrey 2008). This has also been reflected in previous speeches by Pacific leaders, such as former President of Kiribati Anote Tong, who at the UNGA 2008 presented a relocation strategy for the people of Kiribati, largely based around the idea of “prepar[ing] them for the worst-case scenario” and involving “the up-skilling of our people to make them competitive and marketable at international labour markets” (Tong, 2008:7). This ‘up-skilling’ of I-Kiribati was connected to Tong’s long-time focus on “migration with dignity” in the Government's relocation policy.⁶¹

In popular media however, presenting Pacific islanders through a climate refugee narrative may portray them as passive victims whose only option is to emigrate from their own country (McNamara and Gibson, 2009:478). According to Morteux and Barnett (2008) there are many dangers in this kind of discourse because of its dramatic appeal of Pacific Islanders being powerless victims, particularly in the media. Furthermore, it silences other important discourses that highlight the resourcefulness and resilience of Pacific Islanders (Farbotko, 2005:279; Henry and Jeffrey 2008). Kempf (2009:199-200) argues that such portrayals in the media represent a cliché-ridden doomsday scenario which lacks empirical support. He further argues that the strong focus on migration as climate change response stands in the way for developing other strategies that deal with ecological, social and economic challenges (2009:199).

In recent years, however, public debates have slowly changed, and so has the narrative coming *out* of the Pacific. Pacific youth play a critical role in this regard, in that they have become increasingly more involved and visible in speaking out about climate change issues. It has been said that this type of engagement and outspokenness by Pacific youth has not been seen since the engagements over nuclear testing in the 1970s. Krishneil Narayan (2014), a Pacific SIDS Negotiator, explained that “there has been a shift from desperate attempts to seek sympathy through ‘we are drowning’ to acts of leadership and strength paving the way for successfully overcoming the

⁶¹ The ‘migration with dignity’ idea is presented on the website of the Office of the President, Republic of Kiribati, as a crucial element to the relocation policy. Available at: <http://www.climate.gov.ki/category/action/relocation/>

challenges through resilience and innovation”. As an example, he mentioned Fiji’s Youth Climate Movement called Project Survival, whose aim it is to influence decision makers and provide platforms for young people to participate in public discussions.

A similar initiative is the “Stand up for the Pacific campaign” launched in 2012 by the Pacific 350.org group, as well as the Warrior Day of Action in March 2013, with the message “We are not drowning. We are fighting” (Packard 2013). This has given rise to the Pacific Warriors, a group of young Pacific activists who has led demonstrations across the Pacific including a blockade of the Newcastle coal port in Australia with canoes.⁶²



Figure 6: “We are not drowning, we are fighting!” Pacific Warriors in ABC News (2013).

While staying in Suva in August 2014, I met with a Pacific 350.org spokesperson to talk about these recent initiatives led by young people across the region. He explained that one of the main objectives of the 350.org campaigns was to change the narrative about Pacific Islanders and the dissemination of stories:

We realised that most of the time, the stories that are being told about people in the Pacific about climate change is one about we are going to drown, there’s nothing we can do and so forth. . . . Then we realised that it is not the spirit of young people across the Pacific, and we really just wanted to come up with a campaign that could capture

⁶² See for example “Pacific Islanders blockade Newcastle coal port to protest rising sea levels” in *The Guardian* (Davidson 2014).

that spirit - that fighting spirit and that warrior spirit - and just have it as a premise of the work that we do.

The 350.org Pacific Warriors campaign has received broad international attention, and has been featured in a number of news articles around the world, where they have received praise for their fighting spirit and for speaking out about climate change and Pacific youths.

This change of narrative is strongly linked with the desire to break free from the representation of Pacific people as ‘passive victims’ (McNamara and Gibson 2009; Barnett and Campbell 2010) in which a belittling view can be said to be expressed (Hau’ofa 1994). Similarly, descriptions of Pacific islands as vulnerable is complicated because it may invoke ideas about fundamentally weak and powerless people (Barnett and Campbell, 2010:162-165). Vulnerability is, rather, a distinctive term coined by experts, which, according to Barnett and Campbell (2010:161), is “detached (or disembodied) from the contextual environments in which the vulnerable entity and threat are located, following scientific norms”. It is nevertheless a broadly used term within climate change discourse, even by and among Pacific political leaders, partly because its usage is so wide-spread among international declarations as well, such as by the UNFCCC and Kyoto Protocol (Barnett and Campbell, 2010:162). The problem is, however, that such dominant paradigms of vulnerability may be top-down and deny diversity of local agency (Lazrus, 2009:245).

What more can be done to counter such dominant narratives if they are firmly established on the global scene? In order to answer this, I wish to first return to the Waves of Change conference in Hawai’i in 2013 and explore some of the suggestions provided there by Pacific leaders and academics. Moving on to the following year, it will subsequently become clear that 2014 was an important year for Pacific Islanders. It was the International Year of Small Island Developing States as well as the year of the Third International Conference on Small Islands Developing States. One may suggest that 2014 in this regard was another ‘crossroad’ for the Pacific Islands, and as I now will show, the discussions that took place at the time provide important insights into how global narratives of ‘victimisation’ have been countered by local stories and by the development of Pacific climate leadership and diplomacy.

The local stories of *Waa*: Developing a pan-Pacific approach

In a talk at the Waves of Change conference, Dr. Joakim Peter, the director of the College of Micronesia - FSM Chuuk Campus, suggested a way forward for Pacific people based on the vision of the Micronesian term *Waa*. “*Waa* is blood vessels, *Waa* is canoe, *Waa* is people” he explained, and through using this concept, Peter suggested that stories of climate change need to “travel on the local stories of *Waa*”. He thereby argued that in order to make others understand and listen to the Pacific people, one must start at the sea level where Pacific people live, and thereby “make ourselves an enlarged view of the world”. This, he argues, can take place through “the dual concept of *waa*, both as blood vessels that carry life through the body and as canoe, [and] the centrepiece of navigation traditions that moves islands” (Peter, 2000:266). How can this idea work in practice? And how can it be applied to counter the challenges of disconnect between levels as described by Minister deBrum at the very start of the chapter?

I suggest that by understanding the sea level in Peter’s vision as a representation of the world, the sharing of stories becomes a pro-active way of world enlargement. At the same time, Peter’s ideas strongly imply that Pacific people must localise the global narrative of climate change. During his talk, he further argued that this is a most important exercise, because global narratives fuel the global understanding of climate change, as we have already seen. This kind of localising is possible, he continued, by looking for ways to connect the narrative and language of climate change on the global level to the “ground level and sea level” as much as possible. The attempt is not to dissolve the global narrative, he added, but rather for people to use the Pacific stories and use themselves as Pacific Islanders, and thereby use the idea of *Waa* ‘canoe’ to reach the global level and weave the levels of meaning together.

As explained in Chapter 2 and 3, Pacific stories about climate change experiences have great value because they provide place-based insights and knowledges. Peter’s idea is in that sense a model of how to make the place-based perspective connect with other levels and scales. This is also my main reason for including Peter’s proposal about *Waa* at this point, because I believe it can serve as a fruitful example of a vernacular model of knowledge conversion between local and

global contexts through stories. I argue that the *Waa* model is useful as a framework for strategies of climate diplomacy and can serve as a Pacific-led model, a topic I will explore further in Chapter 7. For now, I draw upon Peter's idea to highlight the strength of a strategy that aims to create a relation of understanding by making use of place-based Pacific climate change experiences. This is a rather different approach from the bureaucratic procedures that have dominated the global climate change agenda, as illuminated by Minister deBrum. The proposal by Joakim Peter is an example of presenting new models for approaching climate change; models that are based in Pacific vernacular languages and are non-bureaucratized. As analysed in Chapter 5, the arduous bureaucratic procedures of supranational and interregional actors can be challenging for Pacific countries and their representatives, and the associated procedures may appear 'confused' and 'convoluted'.

Suggestions have therefore been made to take a less bureaucratic and more straightforward approach which includes placing more emphasis on "enhancing dialogue between communities and the region" (Huffer 2006:50). Developing Pacific models of how to create greater dialogue between levels, scales and understandings of Pacific climate change challenges may therefore be a step in the right direction. While the bureaucratic approach may translate people's experiences into a language that is fitting for an EU technocrat or UN bureaucrat, Pacific climate change stories are created in the Pacific people's own words and explanations, and draw on familiar cultural aspects, in order to include non-Pacific people into Pacific experiences.

One may in this regard argue that Peter's vision of *Waa* as simultaneously 'blood', 'canoe', and 'people' reflects a more all-encompassing worldview, in line with Toren's (1995) previously discussed argument, based on Fijian perspectives, that Pacific people are the substance of the land, and vice versa (see Chapter 2). Furthermore, 'the canoe' is strongly associated with movement, as exemplified in Chapter 2 for the Langalanga Lagoon: "Without one, you're stuck". This is not a new idea in Pacific studies and the importance of the canoe in Pacific seafaring societies is well-documented (see Peter 2000; D'arcy 2006), as is its importance for maritime movement between places (see Hviding 1996). Similarly, the

notion of blood has a prominent place within Pacific kinship and sense of belonging (see Strathern 1992; Hviding 1996; Toren and Pauwels 2015).

Taken together, the multiple, interconnected meanings and associations of *Waa* constitute a powerful concept that enables all these notions to come together, and most importantly – as highlighted by Peter in his talk – to make use of the concept of *Waa* to reach others. Peter (2000:255) has in earlier writings argued that Micronesian travelling and travellers' points of departure, both in historical and contemporary form, are vital for "how travellers understand and deal with the space outside of their home/islands". This 'space outside' is, however, according to Peter (2000:266), "no longer 'out there', it is now at home" as a consequence of colonial governments.

Similarly, climate change is no longer an issue for the international debates 'out there', but is now very much an issue that Pacific Islanders have to deal with 'at home'. Peter's notion of *Waa* suggests that in order to counter dominating global narratives, Pacific Islanders must start at their own points of departure, and those are the local stories of climate change, he argues. These stories provide ways to talk about experiences of climate change in the Pacific by Pacific people, outside of the prevailing institutional forms. The next section therefore turns to some of the ways in which this conversion can be explored in practice.

Pacific Climate Leadership

It was frequently argued by speakers at the Waves of Change conference that there was a clear need for greater global understanding of Pacific climate change challenges. The former Chief of Palau's Governmental Division of Marine Resources and now environmental activist Noah Idechong noted in his presentation that the only sacrifices the large scale carbon emitters are ready to make, are ones that sacrifice the Pacific people. This experience of being sacrificed, not heard nor understood, is the reason why Pacific countries have developed a more consolidated regional approach from a strong desire to voice their own concerns. During the Waves of Change conference, the question of leadership, both of the region and of the world, was therefore discussed repeatedly. Several speakers, as reflected most prominently by Minister deBrum in his opening keynote, expressed a lack of confidence among Pacific Islanders that the

international level would ever be able, through existing procedures, to solve the challenges that lie ahead for the Pacific region. Following up on this, Idechong expressed his frustration regarding international processes, bureaucracies and meetings:

The difficulty with climate change - and [as underlined] yesterday when I heard the minister speak - is the frustration with dealing with the international community. We have problems. Copenhagen was the last meeting that I went to and it was so frustrating. There is lack of leadership at the international level. The officers level, the communities, the NGOs – everyone are together, except when it comes to the time when the leaders talk about real sacrifices. When they talk about real sacrifices, the only sacrifices people will make are islanders.

(...) the bureaucracy is not ready to deliver the help that it is supposed to. By the time it gets to the islands, it's gone. The money is used for consultants after consultants, study after study, workshops, and meetings after meetings. By the time it gets to the ground level all we have is a bunch of reports that nobody reads. And for us, English is our second language. How can we read these massive documents that reference this and that meeting and that agreement?

In this statement there is a clear frustration over the way the global bureaucratic system itself is set up, echoing points explored in Chapters 4 and 5. There is a specific problem of too many meetings and too complicated technocratic processes, including the COP vernacular itself – as shown in Chapter 3.

Yet, in spite of the sense of frustration with inaction by other parts of the world and by international climate change actors such as the UNFCCC, many of the speakers, including Idechong, provided ideas about how to overcome such inaction by Pacific action. The conference itself was brought up as an opportunity to develop a sense of leadership among the many participants from all over the region and across fields of expertise, as pointed out by Idechong (2013) in a presentation:

I really enjoy this meeting, because it is the first time we can have Pacific people together so we can share. We have to do a lot of sharing. We have to share, talk story, cooperate and build bridges. And I believe we really have to define where we *should* be going. We have to define where we *are* going. We should stop complaining and start giving direction. And I think we ought to reach out to our ancestors, and reach out to our ingenuity as islanders. (...)

There are 22 other countries and territories in the Pacific. There are 16 independent countries called the Forum Countries. We must begin to get together as Pacific Islanders. In a crisis situation you figure out how we can lead the way. Stop thinking complicated or complaining, but let's really get together and say 'alright, what do we

do'. Let's get some leadership. This will require the Pacific people to be wise and to sign on to lead a new way forward. It is time. And I know we can do it.

Idechong is one of Palau's most prominent environmentalists and has played an important role in pushing forward conservation efforts in his country. Similar conservation initiatives have reflected how other Pacific countries share the same desire to "Lead by example" as exemplified Palau, or, as mentioned by Idechong above, by reaching a state of affairs in which Pacific Islanders could "start giving direction" to others. The Pacific region is in fact now home to many of the largest marine sanctuaries in the world, which is one definite way to establish leadership:

- **Kiribati** established its Phoenix Islands Protected Area in 2008, with a total size of over 400 square kilometres. At the time it was the largest marine protected area in the world, and even though it is now the tenth largest, it is still the largest and deepest UNESCO World Heritage site in the world.
- **New Caledonia** has one of the largest marine protected areas of the world that encompasses the country's entire 1.4 million square kilometres Exclusive Economic Zone and includes the world's largest lagoon. The *Parc naturel de la mer de Corail* was established in 2014.
- In the **Cook Islands** the *Te Marae Moana* marine park was established in June 2017. The marine park is of an impressive size, covering almost 2 million square kilometres. During its announcement at the UN Oceans Conference a week before it was tabled in the Cook Islands Parliament, it was also flagged as a successful display of 'global leadership' (Pacific Islands Report 2017).

In his presentation, Idechong underlined that Pacific people must "share, talk story, cooperate and build bridges", while "reach[ing] out to our ancestors and ... ingenuity as islanders". Such an emphasis on finding the distinct Pacific way echoes Joakim Peter's suggestion of the *Waa*. Other prominent Pacific scholars and public figures have similarly suggested that culture is the way forward to push the Pacific agenda on climate change. A former Secretary General of the Pacific Council of Churches, Fe'iloakitau Kaho Tevi, suggests that there needs to be a change in the narrative from *vulnerable to value*, and that the focus of development should be *culture*. "At the basis for development is culture (kastom, spirituality and belief) not money," Tevi states. As a response, he suggests that "we should be placing Pacific values at the centre of development" (Tevi 2014).

Having brought forth a similar idea in the past, Elise Huffer (2006) called for a greater link between communities at the time of the implementation of the Pacific Plan in 2004. She suggests that this important link can be culture, and mentions examples that include *kastom*, spirituality, and belief. Furthermore, she also suggests that the *talanoa* is a suitable form of dialogue to secure the establishment of a more ‘culture-based’ link, because the *talanoa* is a particular Pacific mode of interaction aiming to “talk story” (Tunufa’i, 2016:229-230). The *talanoa* is based on “reconciliation, inclusion and respect for cultural traditions” (Huffer, 2006:52). Huffer argues that the ‘Pacific way’ should be one based on common Pacific values such as solidarity, reciprocity, kinship, attachment to land and sea, human dignity and shared leadership (Huffer, 2006:50).

In exploring existing manifestations of such a way forward for the Pacific, Knut Rio and Edvard Hviding have shown how cultural heritage can provide social movements with such Pacific values and alternatives (Rio and Hviding, 2011:16). Rio and Hviding show how cultural heritage has served as a template for Pacific people and that local cultural heritage has been important in political innovation and local social movements that may transcend local scales. This shows, Rio and Hviding suggest, that “social movements throughout the Pacific present new values, new social structures, new aesthetics, new ways of ordering space and a re-location of authority, generally to a much greater degree than scholars, political commentators and journalists have been willing to consider” (2011:7).

One example of such Pacific innovation that may underline such a “re-location of authority” is the aforementioned *Majuro Declaration for Climate Leadership*.

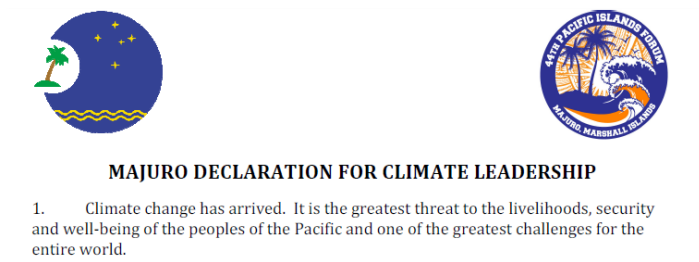


Figure 7: The first paragraph of the Majuro Declaration for Climate Leadership (2013).

This declaration is an important example of Pacific climate leadership, for two reasons that I briefly wish to highlight. First, the Majuro Declaration was seen as a *direct response* to the slow progress of the UN in cutting greenhouse gas emissions, calling explicitly for the need to act, stating that “to lead is to act” (Majuro Declaration, 2013:2). Second, the Pacific countries declared themselves as *Climate Leaders* in the declaration, saying that “We commit to be Climate Leaders” (Majuro Declaration, 2013:1). The document was therefore hoped to be a “game changer” according to former Marshall Islands President Christopher Loeak (UN 2013).

The 2013 PIF meeting where the Declaration was signed was itself a powerful moment, according to former Minister deBrum, because “in the last 20 years, there has never been a concentration of such vulnerable countries under one roof at the same time, and *members of the forum were able to explain the effects of climate change as it affects us personally*” (my emphasis, Al Jazeera 2013). “The issue is about our very survival and sustainability as a people” Palau President Remengesau added (Al Jazeera 2013). But, “in the true spirit of Pacific culture, we don't use harsh words or demands” he pointed out, even when the issue is about survival. It highlights the uniquely Pacific way of how the declaration has been decided upon. Finally, also in true Pacific spirit, the Declaration was presented to former UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon as a “Pacific Gift” at the 68th session of the UN General Assembly later the same year (Yeo 2013). In his speech to the UNGA, former President Loeak of the Marshall Islands said that he hoped the Declaration would stimulate a new wave of climate leadership and that it was time for “true statesmanship” (Yeo 2013). In receiving the Declaration, the Secretary-General congratulated the Pacific countries for adopting the document, and praised them for their efforts to be Climate Leaders.

The Majuro Declaration is a remarkable document because it in many ways is doing the same as the Marine Sanctuaries, namely a strong expression of power through social capital based on the ability to ‘act on climate change’. In addition, presenting it as a Pacific gift at the UN is playing on ideas about gift giving and reciprocity, thereby establishing a typical sense of reciprocal relationship following classical anthropologist Marcel Mauss (2002[1954]). Through this act of gifting the Declaration, the self-declared Pacific Climate Leaders were asking for co-leadership in return, thereby

simultaneously establishing themselves as leaders of the world within the area of climate change, while also making it clear that others are not. In this sense, they were reversing the idea of Pacific countries as passive victims, and instead making it clear to ‘the world’ (in the sense that the UNGA provides an arena to speak to other world leaders) that Pacific Island leaders have the necessary leadership to tackle global climate change.

Pacific Leadership at the UN

Taking and making use of the UN arena has become increasingly important for Pacific countries following independence, and recent developments and accomplishments by Pacific representatives at the UN level further highlight the desire to break free from previous dependencies or categories, and show the increased importance of taking part in UN developments and discussions. Thirteen Pacific states have United Nations membership: Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu and Timor-Leste. Twelve of these, excluding Timor-Leste, are part of the Pacific SIDS (PSIDS) group that plays an important diplomatic role at the UN. All of these countries have Permanent missions and offices at the UN in New York. In underlining the importance of being present at the UN, Tuvalu Prime Minister Sopoaga has previously expressed that their New York office was established for the sole purpose of working against the consequences of climate change (Sopoaga 2014). Such statements clearly reflect the sensed importance of having to be in close proximity of UN headquarters in order to influence discussions on climate change. Although a costly affair for many Pacific countries, having a permanent UN mission has become increasingly important as it provides Pacific representation when global decisions are made.

Establishing a stronger, shared voice in the UN has been long in the making for Pacific representatives. Looking back to the beginning of the 21st century, many Pacific Ambassadors in New York felt marginalised in the UN and limited work-wise from sheer lack of human and financial resources (McNamara, 2009:4). As a consequence of this marginalisation, the need to work collectively as a group has become clear, and Pacific countries are therefore members of the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS),

an important negotiation organisation for the low-lying coastal and small island countries of the world. But calling on the needs of the Pacific more specifically, all 12 Pacific countries with UN missions have established a strong and distinctive model of collaboration and coordination through the PSIDS group (Manoa, 2015:97). The PSIDS group has managed to gain central roles in the UN General Assembly (UNGA) since 2011, frequently delivering statements on behalf of all its members, and has consequentially gained increasing recognition. Some of the successes include the passing of the first climate change resolution, the Fijian diplomat Peter Thompson serving as President of the General Assembly of the United Nations from September 2016 until September 2017, French Polynesia's re-inscription on the list of non-self-governing territories, as well as achieving stand-alone Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) on ocean and climate change (Manoa, 2015:95). It has been argued that the PSIDS group now represents the strongest collective diplomacy at the UN (Manoa, 2015:97). For other countries, this collective diplomacy also makes it a very sought-after grouping to build strong relations alongside, because each PSIDS country has one vote in the UN, and a strong relationship of one non-Pacific country to the group is frequently considered to imply a 12-vote support (although PSIDS members are not generally required by the collective to vote in unity).⁶³

Other important events for Pacific countries in the UN include Fiji being elected chair of the Group of 77+China for 2013. It was the first time a Pacific country chaired the group since its establishment in 1964 and was described as a "rare opportunity to represent itself on the global stage" that would be particularly important for the development of a stronger regional voice (Wilson 2012). In a statement after the decision had been made in 2012, Prime Minister Bainimarama (2012) announced the success of leading the group and underlined Fiji's position "at the top", over China even:

We have been given the honour of presiding over the deliberations of an important bloc of nations in the world, including the world's most populous country, China. We truly have something to celebrate - that our small island nation is so well regarded in the community of developing countries that they have decided to place us at the top, to chair their meetings.

⁶³ As an example, Norway has for several years built up a stronger relationship with the PSIDS because the group can provide as many as 12 votes in Norway's bid for a temporary seat (2021-2022) in the UN Security Council.

Under Fiji's leadership role in G77+China the Warsaw Mechanism for Loss and Damage (WIM) was established at COP19 in Warsaw, Poland in November 2013, following two decades of negotiations of the topic. This was considered another major win for the Pacific countries.

2014: The International Year of Small Island States and the Third International Conference on Small Island Developing States

Another highlight in Pacific-UN relations was when 2014 was named the International Year of Small Island States (SIDS), declared by former Secretary General Ban Ki-moon in order to make the 38 small island states of the world a UN priority. Questions were raised about the potential and success of this initiative, for example by Nauru's UN ambassador Marlene Moses that same year: "There needs to be a paradigm shift in terms of how the global community and international institutions, including the United Nations, focus on the SIDS priority. At the moment we feel the international community has not accorded it the appropriate attention" (Yeo 2014). The critique of not being rightly prioritised echoes fears expressed by Pacific ambassadors already a decade earlier (McNamara 2009). In calling for a paradigm shift, Ambassador Moses further made it clear that Pacific voices *must* be heard.

Maclellan (2015:5) suggests that new paradigms should be reflected through suitable interests for Pacific islands, such as blue and green growth or a more traditional village-based economic structure. But it is not just about economics, as pointed out by Ambassador Moses when, in the same interview, she pointed to the most important role of Pacific countries in key UN debates:

Without the voice of the SIDS you won't have a credible climate regime in Paris [at COP21]. Without our opinion and our priorities, the post-2015 development goals [Sustainable Development Goals] will not be universal. The UN secretary general's climate summit will not be credible without the moral voice of the most vulnerable group.

Interestingly enough, the Ambassador here uses a similar approach as when the Majuro Declaration was gifted to the UN, where the clear role for Pacific countries at the UN is expressed. In further exploring this I draw on the previously introduced concept of climate change-ness, most prominently exemplified here by Ambassador Moses in her

statement making it clear that Pacific island countries are the ones that provide the UN summits with ‘credibility’. In other words: the world *needs* Pacific countries at these global discussions, not only because of a moral necessity, but also because Pacific countries *know* climate change and thereby provide a particular sense of credibility.

Similar ideas were raised at the Third International Conference on Small Island Developing States held in Samoa September 2014. Held only every ten years, this conference is of great importance for SIDS as a venue and opportunity to share experiences and coordinate efforts.⁶⁴ I attended the conference as an accredited observer through the ECOPAS project, and was at once taken by the great effort of the Pacific delegations and, in particular, the host country Samoa, in arranging such a large-scale event, of global scale and scope. The long road from Faleolo airport to Samoa’s capital Apia had been decorated by colourful flags and banners, welcoming delegates from around the world. Apia was adorned by images of islands, people, plants, ocean and the world, hand drawn by Samoan children, and every village was blooming and had large banners wishing visitors welcome.

The SIDS conference is important for a number of reasons. It represented a major effort by the PSIDS group, as they led many of the discussions and events during the conference. The conference provided an arena in which to discuss experiences, knowledge and current and future strategies among ambassadors, prime ministers and presidents, ministers, scientists, activists, educators, youth, performers, and others. Further, the conference outcome was what became known as the Small Island Developing States Accelerated Modalities of Action [SAMOA] Pathway. This document clearly states the need for greater collaboration between SIDS regions – notably the Caribbean and the Pacific – as well as people, governments, civil society and the private sector. The SAMOA Pathway reaffirms SIDS’ existing UN commitments and it recognises many of the particular challenges, such as climate change impacts, experienced by these countries in general. It also highlights a need for

⁶⁴ In 1992 during the Rio Earth Summit the United Nations first recognised islands as a distinct group as Small Islands Developing States (SIDS). It was therefore called for international and regional cooperation and coordination among SIDS and that the first SIDS conference should be held. The result was the 1994 in Barbados Conference which led to the Barbados Declaration. The next meeting in 2005 was held in Mauritius, and that resulted in the Mauritius Declaration and Mauritius Strategy. The latest conference in 2014 in Samoa, discussed here, led to SIDS Accelerated Modalities of Action plan, also called the SAMOA Pathway.

the UN to undertake a comprehensive review of its own system in support for SIDS, requesting the UN to provide greater support than what has previously been the norm to Small Island Developing States.⁶⁵ The SAMOA Pathway identifies the priorities of SIDS and therefore played an important role for mapping the specific challenges and requirements of Pacific countries used to guide the drafting of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development decided on in 2015.



Photo 9: 1st Plenary Meeting. The Formal Opening of UN-SIDS conference, Samoa 2014.

The overall theme of the SIDS conference was “The sustainable development of Small Island Developing States through genuine and durable partnerships” and partnership was a major focus.⁶⁶ The concept of partnership in aid relations is a fairly recent one and is based on collaboration with development partners, or, in the words of Kaliopate Tavola (2015:29), “partnerships for cooperation, rather than for dominance”. The aim is that the partners, such as the recipient country and the donor, have a relationship based on being equal partners and moves away from “over-prescriptive and interventionist development models of the past” (Abrahamsen, 2004:1454). In such

⁶⁵ Article 119 of the SAMOA Pathway “request the Secretary-General conduct a comprehensive review of United Nations system support for small island developing States with a view to enhancing the overall effectiveness of such support and the respective roles in supporting the sustainable development of small island developing States” (Article 119, SAMOA Pathway 2014).

⁶⁶ During and immediately after the SIDS conference 312 new partnerships were established, and there are currently almost 700 SIDS partnerships globally (see sids2014.org).

a partnership, the idea is that the donor does not run the project, but rather provides the financial support needed and monitors it. The process is meant to be more inclusive and bottom-up, and entering the partnership should be based on the receiving country's needs rather than the donor's demands (Lie 2015). The practice of partnerships has, however, been critiqued for not living up to the idea of a mutual reciprocal obligation by both parts, and continues to bear asymmetries in the relationship between donor and receiver (Lie 2011; Abrahamsen 2004). Rita Abrahamsen (2005:1453) therefore argues that the only way this kind of partnerships are possible because of advanced liberal ideas that govern through self-government in a Foucauldian sense. In his analysis of aid relationships, Jon Harald Sande Lie (2015:724) argues that although it is not explicitly stated as conditions of partnership funding, the partnership approach still "seek[s] to reassert it in others by applying more indirect means of governance, as opposed to direct rule as implied by the erstwhile top-heavy conditionality approaches."

Such challenges in development relationships are still prevailing, and needs an analysis that goes beyond my intention and scope here. Instead, one may ask why Pacific countries (and other small island nations considered vulnerable countries) enter into such relationships if it may entail being subject to indirect governance as argued by Abrahamsen and Lie? It is not, I argue, because Pacific countries are ignorant of some of these indirect consequences of partnerships. On the contrary, the statements by Pacific leaders and others included in this chapter demonstrate an awareness on exactly such issues of inequality. What is more, climate change may be seen as a game changer in aid relations, since Pacific countries are becoming increasingly involved in setting their own conditions for partnerships and for partners. Climate change, which is a consequence of emissions by other countries, should ideally constitute enough leverage in itself for receiving some sort of financial justice, yet this has proved extremely difficult to achieve. Different strategies are therefore carried out to ensure collaborations that benefit all actors. Regional organisations, such as PIDF, have for example been very clear on their strategy of building 'inclusive' partnerships that include leaders as well as civil society (Fry and Tarte, 2015:8). Furthermore, geopolitical interests have come into accelerated play as Pacific countries through their

Pacific Small Island Developing States (PSIDS) group use their UN position as leverage in potential or actual collaboration with other partner countries (Tavola 2015:27).

This leverage is, for example, found in the Pacific UN member states' votes for countries who wish to lobby for one of the temporary seats at the table of the UN Security Council. The sense of authority that resides within a UN vote is perhaps best described by Prime Minister Enele Sopoaga during a side event I attended at the UN-SIDS conference in Apia: "My message is clear: If you don't support us, we won't vote for you. For us, mutual trust and confidence is very important. If you aren't able to meet that - then you don't have our vote". It most certainly shows that Pacific countries are acutely aware of the immanent kind of power in a UN vote, and that this awareness may be used to establish a certain authority in any kind of relationship with other states at UN level.

The International Year of Small Island States and the Third International Conference on Small Island Developing States in 2014 were opportunities for Pacific countries to voice their concerns. Although one may still question whether or not 'SIDS priorities' are in fact prioritised within the 'international community', as highlighted by Nauru's Ambassador Moses, 2014 provided several opportunities to discuss what those priorities entail and how Pacific countries could jointly make sure that they are heard.

In the final part of this chapter, I wish to illustrate how Pacific climate change stories were defined and brought forward through acts of climate diplomacy in order to influence the global narrative on climate change.

Pacific climate change stories: Creating the relation

Defining Climate Diplomacy and the need for contextualisation

The 2014 SIDS Conference gathered island states from around the world for discussions. During the four days of conference, twenty-one heads of state and government and 3,500 delegates attended meetings and side events that went on from early morning to late at night. The conference has been described as "a unique opportunity" for SIDS to "showcase new leadership", not least because "the people and

the Government of Samoa were able to bring the international community to its shores in a historic fashion” (International Institute for Sustainable Development, 2014:12). It was therefore a most fitting fora to discuss developments of international relations, under the auspices of ‘home shores’. At a side event about climate diplomacy and foreign policy challenges, the German moderator asked the room “What are the geopolitical risks of climate change?” On the panel were Pacific leaders including Minister deBrum of Marshall Islands, Prime Minister Sopoaga of Tuvalu, and President Tong of Kiribati, as well as several representatives from regional organisations and European institutions.

Sitting at the back of the room, I listened carefully as the panellists started reflecting around the moderator’s question. “First of all,” Tong replied as the first speaker, “we need to define *what ‘climate diplomacy’ is*”. He then underlined that what for some countries is considered politics, is for Kiribati a matter of survival. Strongly supported by the other Pacific panellists, it was similarly argued by Prime Minister Sopoaga that for the Pacific Islands, this issue goes far beyond politics between countries. The discussion that followed is an illustration of different perceptions of what climate diplomacy is and what it can do.

Another German panellist replied to Prime Minister Sopoaga saying that one of the greatest threats was that to the global development agenda. This meant in particular, the panellist argued, any threats that could jeopardise the Millennium Development Goals (MDG). The discussion was then quickly redirected. Instead of focusing on the concerns to the MDGs as expressed by the German speaker, Prime Minister Sopoaga brought the discussion to the levels of islands and people. He stressed that climate diplomacy in Pacific countries *had* to involve local governments in particular because “they are the owners of the land and the real people to deal with”. He was backed up by Minister deBrum who several times underlined that “climate diplomacy begins at home”. Talking at the international level was not going to help unless it included the local situation, deBrum continued:

I believe very strongly that climate diplomacy begins at home. The Marshall Islands are lying just two meters above sea level out in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. Our territory and national identity is under threat. Our people are starting to ask the hard questions, and with increasing regularity: What is happening to my country; where will I go; what will my children do?

What can we learn from this discussion? I find that it reflects a difference in understanding climate change itself. While the German representative talked about climate diplomacy as a matter of reaching global development goals, it was constantly talked about by the Pacific leaders as a local issue involving and starting with Pacific people themselves. In an analysis of the division between “home” and “the outside world” in diplomacy, Neumann introduces diplomacy as “the conduct of official relations” between states (2012:1). The conduct of such relations may indeed be guided by development goals such as the MDGs or the Sustainable Development Goals, as these successive UN agendas represent a common ground for mapping universal issues. But as the experience of climate change and its context for people and place differ greatly, so too it seems, does perceptions about climate diplomacy itself. In a final response to the German presenter, Prime Minister Sopoaga underlined this as he criticised the MDGs in the sense that “they only focus on ends, not on means” and that for climate diplomacy to be successful, the answer was to work towards “*contextualising* [climate change] for a better approach”.

I suggest that the contextualising approach highlighted by Prime Minister Sopoaga is an important part of the means itself, and that climate diplomacy in this sense is established as part of a larger process of building up an understanding of climate change experiences in the Pacific ‘at home’. For Pacific diplomats, climate diplomacy is simultaneously both “at home” and in “the outside world”. The first reason for this is because climate change has local effects, ‘local people’ are automatically involved and care deeply, as shown in the quote from Minister deBrum’s.

A second reason why diplomacy is both ‘at home’ and ‘outside’ is that climate diplomats (including heads of state and governments) are first and foremost Pacific Islanders. They, too, have what Joakim Peter called ‘departure points’ from where they obtain their stories. They, too, can be seen as ‘dividuals’ in Marilyn Strathern’s sense (1988), in that they have “sociality within” through their embodied social relations and sense of place. “I am just a fisherman,” Palau’s President Remengesau is often heard saying in his speeches around the world. “I am really just a fisherman trying to protect his corner of the Pacific Ocean for his family and his country - no different from what

my forebears have done for thousands of years” (Remengesau 2015) he told participants at a UN Environment meeting. Such statements strongly exemplify the sense of connection of place and social obligations: Despite having the responsibilities of being the President of a country, he is “as dividually as [he is] individually conceived” (Strathern, 1988:13), and ‘no different from his forebears’.

Climate diplomacy in a Pacific sense, then, is not separate from this connection between place and people, especially if thinking of diplomacy within the frame of Peter’s notion of *Waa*. Similar to *Waa*, the Pacific diplomats can be bearers of stories, knowledges, and places. The functions of a specific Pacific climate diplomacy, is to contextualise, localise and convert climate change experiences from ‘home’ in order to create a relation to ‘the outside world’.

The relation through Pacific climate change stories

Perhaps a concrete example is the best way to explain how such conversions of Pacific climate change stories may take shape and to illustrate how it is possible to create a relation between local and global narratives.

In October 2015, Minister Tony deBrum was getting ready to leave the Marshall Islands for the upcoming high-level Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDC) International Forum in Rabat, Morocco, co-hosted by European Commission. However, on short notice he was unable to travel and attend the meeting in Morocco because of a storm that hit the islands and caused a large king tide.

In a Twitter post shortly before his scheduled departure, deBrum apologised for not being able to make it to the meeting. The reason, he said, was because the ocean was flooding his home (@TonydeBrum 2015a):



In another photo, posted by Minister deBrum, he appears to be standing at the front door of his house in Marshall Islands, looking out at the ocean that is gushing towards him (@TonydeBrum 2015b):



In these messages he establishes strong connections between his home, his embodied experience of climate change (what he calls a ‘climate attack’) and the global level. He is providing his audience with a behind-the-scenes view of a minister beleaguered by rising seas, the proof that climate change is real, ultimately because he is facing climate change inside his own house where he lives. Minister deBrum cannot leave his home because he is worried that his seawall, the protection of his house, will collapse. Seawalls are considered highly important in climate change adaptation measures, but not even deBrum’s seawall stands a real chance in this storm. He further builds his argument right to the Rabat meeting in saying that “Nobody can say targets go far enough”, thereby hinting at the global warming goals that the INDCs sought to establish in Morocco, ahead of the COP21 Paris climate conference in December the same year.

I argue that Minister deBrum here provides a representation of a place – his home in the Marshall Islands. His home is under ‘attack’ by climate change. The images posted by him on social media show how climate change is very much an embodied experience: the sea is splashing in his face as he stands in the doorway, afraid of being hit by a stranded boat. These Twitter posts are not just about providing proof that climate change is happening, they also seek to create a relation at the juncture of where the reality of climate change is directly affecting his life and jeopardising his official obligations to attend a very important global meeting. The INDC meeting was indeed held to discuss the global targets that must be reached by the world in order to slow down the effects of climate change and global warming. But Minister deBrum shuts down potential discussion about targets even before they started, as he provides a direct and instantaneous story of what such targets and warming degrees *actually* mean. In this he is doing direct Pacific climate diplomacy, by tending to official foreign relations from home.

Pacific climate change stories are thus first and foremost about the contextualisations of climate change. This process invokes a conceptualisation and contextualisation of what climate change looks like and who is living with it, working towards establishing a connection between the international/global level and ‘the sea level’.

Strathern (1995:9) has argued that people are bound together by the idea of their relationships, and that being bound together constitutes a relation, noting that the concept of relation can be applied to any form of connection (1995:17): “For relations are produced through the very activity of understanding when that understanding has to be produced from within”, Strathern states, “that is, when things in the world can only be compared with other things on the same earthly place” (1995:18). Pacific climate change stories, even in the form of a Twitter post, may seem to do exactly this in a world where climate change is affecting people differently and where people therefore have very different understandings. Pacific climate change stories are both a physical sign of climate change and an abstract idea that attempts to establish a relation across the world, ultimately founded on similar, shared forms of understanding.

Pacific Islanders are actively trying to change the global narrative associated with climate change, which includes changing narratives about themselves in dealing with climate change. They are no longer victims, but are instead Climate Leaders who are ‘fighting’ and being vocal and visible at the UN, in the media, online, and as activists. Pacific climate change stories are also about ideas and understandings of climate change in terms of what will happen in the future versus what is happening now. This is visible through the very first sentence of the Majuro Declaration which states that “Climate change has arrived” (Majuro Declaration, 2013:1). The statement is a crystal-clear claim that climate change is present right now in Pacific countries; climate change *is already* a reality of their day-to-day lives and experiences.

Smallness can, as underlined by Paul D’Arcy (2006:173), be a weakness in the modern world, but it may also be source of strength and he uses the notion of buoyancy to prove his point. He explains: “Buoyancy is the capacity to float over even the most threatening waves. It is not a matter of size or resources. Small canoes can have this capacity as can small nations” (D’Arcy, 2006:173). This capacity, D’Arcy argues, is dependent on five critical areas: effective leadership, discipline, personal responsibility, forward planning, and adaptability (2006:173). Considering the developments we are currently seeing in Oceania as examined in this chapter, the region has come a long way on its path to prove its capacity in each of D’Arcy’s five areas, as the Pacific Island countries are learning to paddle the canoe together, so to

speak. This quote from a summary note published by the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD, 2014:12) after the UN-SIDS Conference illustrates the growing international recognition of these island states as leaders:

These islands, now connected to the world like never before, may also be its leader in the years to come. As their ships explored the world in ancient times with the stars and waves as guides, so now do the SIDS hope to lead their people and partners in a new direction.

Pacific people have shown leadership, dedication, and adaptability – not only to the diverse physical impacts of climate change, but also to the changing geostrategic, political and epistemological environments that they are subjected to. They are, however, not merely being subjected, but are increasingly creating such environments themselves through their making of new geopolitical structures, their noteworthy presence in international fora to share their stories, as well as maintaining the need to have several paddles driving the canoe forward. As the next chapter will show, the direction of this collectively paddled canoe has led the Pacific Islands to take on the ultimate leadership role for climate change, through Fiji's presidency of the UNFCCC's COP23.

Chapter 7

At the COP: UN Climate Negotiations and Pacific position-making

Introduction

“Voila! History is coming. In fact, history is now”. These are the words of then President of France, François Hollande, only hours before the Paris Agreement was adopted on 12 December 2015 at COP21 in Paris. He was referring to the approval of the Paris Agreement; an international climate agreement with the aim of reducing greenhouse gas emissions and the result of negotiations between 196 parties (195 UN member states and EU). Described as “a new era in global cooperation” (République Française 2018), the agreement is the first universal agreement in the history of climate negotiations. As this chapter will show, Pacific delegates played a key role in this historic event.

COP21 also marks the start of my own participation as an accredited member of the Palau delegation and the first time I experienced a “transnational mega-event” (Little, 1995:265). The Conference of the Parties (COP) are key to the organisation of how the world deals with climate change. COP is the supreme decision-making body of UNFCCC that meets annually in one of the countries in the five UN regions of Africa, Asia-Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean, Eastern Europe, and Western Europe and Others. It gathers thousands of participants every year and during the two hectic weeks of a COP, several hundred meetings and side events are held.

In this chapter, I explore the participation and roles of Pacific delegations at the UN climate negotiations. The previous chapters have by now established that many Pacific Islanders find the UN system complicated and convoluted, and COPs are no exception to this. Yet, a further examination of COPs in recent years, particularly since COP21 in 2015, shows that Pacific delegates are becoming increasingly well-versed in their ability to navigate their way within this complex global system. Through an examination of conference processes, configurations of power and meeting forms, I

discuss the spaces and opportunities for Pacific position-making at the three 2015-2017 UN climate negotiations COP21 in Paris, COP22 in Marrakech, and COP23 in Bonn.

As this chapter aims to show, getting the Paris Agreement approved and including global efforts to limit temperature increase to 1.5°C was in part the result of ongoing efforts by many Pacific delegates. The agreement means that its signatories are obliged to take the necessary actions on climate change, including reducing their greenhouse gas emissions in order to “keep the global average temperature well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels, while pursuing efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C” (United Nations 2015). Due to the dim scientific prognosis of the consequences of a 2° C increase, for Pacific countries, decisions in the Paris Agreement became a question about what Pacific Islanders were able to live with in the future. Because of this grave existential dimension, it is therefore of utmost importance for Pacific delegates who attend COPs to achieve an understanding by other countries of their situation.

As I have argued repeatedly, Pacific countries are doing so by incorporating recognisable aspects of vernacular culture and sociality as an essential part of developing a distinctive Pacific climate diplomacy in global climate change negotiations. This includes an emphasis on stories, place-based knowledge, and identity, most recently and prominently shown during Fiji’s role as the COP Presidency in 2017-2018. Having closely followed developments from COP21 in Paris to COP23 in Bonn, it has also become increasingly clear to me that Pacific delegations work to change the narrative from one of being victims, to one where they are climate leaders. This final chapter shows in detail how Pacific delegates are doing so, and thereby draws on interrelated arguments made in previous chapters in order to demonstrate the conversions of scales and levels in Pacific position-making in the world.

Selina’s story

Coming full circle, I will now go back to where I started in Chapter 1: Saturday 12 December 2015 and the final day of COP21 in Paris. Heads of State, Ministers, negotiators, journalists, myself, and nearly 40,000 other participants were all gathered at the 160,000 m² conference area at Parc des Expositions at Le Bourget, a northern

suburb of Paris. The conference was running a day on overtime to finalise a text for what came to be known as the Paris Agreement. Many delegates who were in the national negotiation teams had been working day and night over the last two weeks in order to finish a draft text that could be approved in the final plenary meeting.

Many of the attendees had participated in numerous conferences over the years (and even decades), and had been wishing to see this particular day ever since they started attending the COP negotiations. “Spirits are high”, I frequently heard delegates say, but the failure of COP15 in 2009 in Copenhagen had not escaped their memories. “No one here wants a repetition of Copenhagen”, said one of the Chairs in a meeting I attended earlier in the day, referring to what had been a complete failure to agree on any text. However, on this day in December 2015, the delegates and ‘the world’ had never been closer to a global agreement to stop dangerous emissions, the Chair further pointed out. But the text still had to be passed at the final meeting by the Comité de Paris consultations. The Comité de Paris was established by the COP21 Presidency solely in order to finalise the draft agreement and decision text. In 2014-2015, the COP Presidency was France, and the COP President was the Minister of Foreign Affairs of France, Laurent Fabius.

The final and seventh meeting of the Comité de Paris was scheduled to begin at 5.30 pm. A new draft of the agreement had been released earlier that Saturday, and it was now in the hands of the Heads of State, Ministers and other High Level delegates to approve the agreement text. I was lucky enough to get a ticket for the final meeting and headed over to the large plenary hall well ahead of time. From experience, I knew that even having a ticket was not a guarantee for actually getting into the hall as the seats filled up fast. Standing outside the entrance of the plenary hall, I suddenly saw a huge crowd walk towards me. People were running around, holding cameras above their heads in order to get a shot of the people walking in the middle of the crowd. Eager to see what celebrity that might hide in the middle (Arnold Schwarzenegger had drawn quite the crowd a few days before) I quickly jumped up on a chair to have a look. To my surprise, it was not a movie star or a famous entertainer; it was Minister Tony deBrum from the Marshall Islands walking right in the middle of the chaos of people and flashing cameras. By his side, were several other prominent people, such as

the German Environment Minister Barbara Hendricks, European Commissioner for Climate Action and Energy Miguel Arias Cañete, then Norwegian Minister for Climate and Environment Tine Sundtoft, and the United States Special Envoy for Climate Change Todd Stern.

I soon realised that what I was witnessing, was the High Ambition Coalition (referred to at the meetings as ‘the Coalition’) making a grand entry. The Coalition had been formed several months before the December conference when around fifteen of its members gathered in “a Michelin starred restaurant famous for its fine wines, foie gras and oysters” (King 2015). It was, however, kept secret until the final week of the conference, but then quickly gained momentum as more and more countries joined. On the final day, when walking into the plenary hall, the Coalition had over 100 member countries. The Coalition’s main positions included recognising the need to include the goal of keeping global warming to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels, to set a clear long-term goal on global warming in line with scientific advice, a five-year review and a mechanism in place to raise overall ambition and monitor progress. The 1.5°C ambition had been a major issue in negotiations at the beginning of the conference, and the discussions had reflected huge differences in opinion and ambition between developing and developed countries, the latter wanting to settle on a 2°C goal. In the final text, however, both were included in the following: “well below 2 degrees C above pre-industrial levels and pursuing efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5 degrees C above pre-industrial levels” (United Nations 2015).

Yet, the Coalition was not an official negotiating group, but, as Minister deBrum described it during a press briefing, it was “rather about joining the voices of all of those who are committed to joining an ambitious agreement and a safe climate future. Big and small, rich and poor” (Darby and King 2015). It thereby functioned as a bridging alliance between countries from all sides, and allowed for them to meet across existing negotiation groups and country blocks. One of the main initiators, also described as “the brilliant mind behind it” (Mathisen and Harvey 2015), was indeed Minister deBrum, which is why he was so obviously at the very core of the Coalition crowd that was slowly walking into the plenary room. As a sign of membership in the Coalition, Minister deBrum and the Marshallese delegation had provided each member

with a lapel pin made of coconut husk, brought from the Marshall Islands. The ministers from the countries that had joined the Coalition were now all wearing the pin as they entered the plenary hall for the final meeting.

Once the group had entered, I quickly went into the hall and found a seat at the back of the room. It turned out I was in no rush. Although the meeting was scheduled for 5.30 pm, it never seemed to start. The COP President and others who chaired the meeting did not take their seats. Instead, delegates were walking around, talking to each other. There seemed to be some confusion about the wording of the text as one of the articles used the word ‘shall’ instead of ‘should’ After quite a while, I needed to charge my phone, so I made my way towards the front of the room towards available power plugs. I then proceeded to walk around the room, talking to delegates who were sitting at the desks behind their country signs. Discussions were taking place everywhere across the room in small break out groups, also known as *huddles*. There was one large *huddle* in one of the corners. Another *huddle* had formed exactly where I was charging my phone, so I got stuck right next to the group, waiting for them to finish.

After a while a number of the people from the huddle walked away, amongst others, then US Secretary of State John Kerry who proceeded to walk over to China’s Special Representative on Climate Change Xie Zhenhua. Standing just a few metres away from me, they were talking with their heads closely together, while looking intensely at each other. Finally, after a few minutes, I saw them both smiling before they shook hands in a way that looked like they had come to some sort of agreement. A woman standing next to them then shouted “C’est ça va! C’est ça va!” (It’s OK! It’s OK!). And just like that, the large plenary venue that had been buzzing for several hours suddenly quietened down and people quickly ran to their seats. The COP21 President finally wished everyone welcome to the meeting that now could officially start 7:16 PM — a long two hours after it was originally scheduled.

From then on, it was only the matter of minutes until the highlight everybody had been waiting for ensued. As the President beat the gavel on the table shortly after and declared the agreement as adopted, the whole room jumped up in joy, clapping, cheering, some crying and hugging. The Chairs at the front of the room on stage were smiling, hugging and holding hands raised up in the air. I turned around to a fellow

delegate and we hugged, as did everyone else. There was an overwhelming sense of relief, particularly after what had just been two intense hours of discussions right before. Finally, after a while, the room settled down and the floor was opened for closing statements from countries that wanted to speak. Each speaker had strictly three minutes. The President reminded every speaker of this time limit before taking the floor. If anyone should forget, there was also a large display showing the remaining time on the screens around the room. For those who did not finish within three minutes, the timer became red, and the speaker was promptly interrupted by the President.

After a while, it became the Marshall Islands' turn. At this point, many countries had already given their statements and as it was getting late, around 10 pm. Some delegates had started to leave already, while others were taking the opportunity to have a final chat with friends from other delegations as many were heading off the day after. I was still sitting at the back of the room, observing and listening to the many statements that by now sounded rather monotonous in both deliverance and content.

Minister deBrum's voice then took over the room as he began to speak on behalf of his country, highlighting the importance of the Paris Agreement and the important role of the High Ambition Coalition. However, exactly one minute into his speech, after saying that the agreement was securing a safe planet for our children, Minister deBrum handed the microphone over to a young girl sitting at his side. She introduced herself as Selina Leem, an 18-year-old girl from Majuro in Marshall Islands and the conference's youngest delegate. The room suddenly went silent as people stopped their own conversations in order to look around the room to ascertain who this unexpected speaker was. She clearly differed from the speakers that had been before her. It did not take long until she had everyone's attention.

My name is Selina Leem and I am a small island girl with big dreams from the island of Majuro in the Marshall Islands.

I am only 18 years old but ever since I can remember, I have felt nervous about my home. I have always been hearing my island is changing, that it's not the same as what it used to be when my parents and my grandparents were growing up.

I remember, back when I was six or seven, my grandpa, told me a story about our islands being submerged by water. I had never been scared of the water because I practically grew up surrounded by it, but I remember it was during those moments where I felt immense fear by the water.

It dawned on me as I would stand on that only one road on Majuro that on my left is water, and on my right is water. I am surrounded by water.

Maybe it was his way of reprimanding me when I was misbehaving or maybe, he was simply telling the truth. I do not know. He never got to tell me, nor did I get to ask him.

He told me about how the earth was warming, even at the young age, I could notice that it has indeed gotten warmer.

He would say to me the ice in the North Pole and South Pole where Santa lives will all soon melt and as they melt, the water will rise and soon flood our islands. We used to have king tides annually, but he said they will become stronger and larger and more frequent.

And he was telling the truth. The king tides did get stronger, they did get larger, and they did get more frequent.

At this point, the timer on the screen was already blinking red as the Marshall Islands' speaking time had well exceeded the strict three-minute limit. However, the crowd was still listening to Selina, and the President did not attempt to stop her. She then proceeded to hold up the coconut husk pin that Minister deBrum had gifted to every member in the High Ambition Coalition, and the connection between the coconut, the island, the next generation and the world leaders sitting in that room played out like a grand finale to a well-mastered plan, as she explained:

The coconut leaf I wear on my hair and I hold up in my hand is from the Marshall Islands. I wear them in today in hope of keeping them for my children and my grandchildren – these simple strands of coconut leaf.

There are many leaders around this room who share with me – with us – this hope for saving our world, and are wearing a little piece of the Marshall Islands today.

As it happened: 195 countries agreed on the Paris climate deal

I hope you keep it and show it to your children and grandchildren, and tell them a new story about how you helped a little island and the whole world today.

This agreement is for those of us whose identity, whose culture, whose ancestors, whose whole being, is bound to their lands.

I have only spoken about myself and my islands but the same story will play out everywhere in the world. If this is a story about our islands, it is a story for the whole world.

Sometimes when you want to make a change, then it is necessary to turn the world upside down. Because it is not for the better, but it is simply for the best.

This Agreement should be the turning point in our story; a turning point for all of us. At almost two minutes overtime, Selina's speech was finished and as soon as she stopped talking, people in the plenary hall again started applauding and cheering. At the very front of the room, then Executive Secretary of the UNFCCC, Christiana Figueres, instantly stood up and eagerly clapped after hearing Selina's speech. Soon, everyone in the room was giving Selina a standing ovation, some running over to where she was sitting to take a photo with her. It was clear from the reaction of the audience in the room, that her words had made an impression and that they had listened to her speech.

After the Marshall Islands delegation had given the statement, they walked out of the plenary hall and I followed. As soon as I came out the front door, I saw that a large group from the other Pacific delegations had gathered right outside in the cafeteria. Pacific delegates were celebrating the success of having an agreement, cheering with drinks, smiling and taking photos. I quickly walked over, picked up a drink and cheered along with them as they were chanting the catchphrase: "One point five, to stay alive!"

* * *

The day I just described has been called one of the most important days in history, as it was the day an international agreement on climate that included just about all states in the world finally was agreed on after years of discussions. Underlined by the UNFCCC, "the Paris Agreement for the first time brings all nations into a common cause based on their historic, current and future responsibilities" (UNFCCC 2015). The final day of COP21 is important as an example of Pacific agency as well. How can it be that a delegate from a small Pacific country led one of the most important global coalitions in order to push the Paris Agreement through? A Pacific country – a Small Island Developing State (SIDS) – was at the very forefront, leading the way for others to follow. The example also visualises the massive system that constitutes a COP, and exemplifies some of the spaces that small countries like the Marshall Islands have taken advantage of in order to push forward their agenda and to position themselves. It also shows how a Pacific country may break meeting protocols to get their message across.

Furthermore, the speech by Selina provides an example of how Pacific countries can ‘create the relation’ to their lived experience of climate change on a global stage. Yet, they are doing so through incorporating recognisable Pacific elements, such as the coconut husk pin and a young Pacific girl, into a protocol-heavy UN system. In her speech Selina talks about stories, generational knowledge, identity, culture, and land, as well as the need for a global turning point. The speech thereby illustrates the intentional strategy of Pacific island people of taking on a leadership role in global climate discussions. Although Pacific countries were not alone in securing the COP21 success, they played a visible and important role.⁶⁷ More generally, at the recent COPs I have attended, Pacific countries have had what one could call an inverted proportional presence, most recently shown through Fiji’s COP23 Presidency of the first ever ‘Pacific COP’ in Bonn.

Conference processes and spaces for position-making

COPs are what Paul Little (1995:265) calls ‘transnational mega-events’ where people from across the world and from a vast range of backgrounds come together to discuss, negotiate and “plan the future development of the Earth and its people”. Since 1994, the UN climate change conference serves as the formal meeting for a number of bodies, including: Conference of the Parties (COP), Conference of the Parties serving as the Meeting of the Parties (CMP), subsidiary bodies, COP/CMP Bureau, and, since the ratification of the Paris Agreement by the world’s states during 2016, the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Paris Agreement (CMA), as well as the Ad Hoc Working Group on the Paris Agreement (APA).⁶⁸

What is often described as one conference, as a “COP”, is, in other words, composed of a large number of different bodies with numerous ongoing meetings. The COP is, however, the supreme decision-making body of the Convention, where all Parties to the Convention are represented.

⁶⁷ Other factors that also supported the adoption of the Paris Agreement should be pointed out. Important factors include several years of global diplomacy, the UN climate summit in 2014, a joint US-China climate statement in 2014, and the involvement of other important public figures such as the Pope. See Christoff 2016 for in-depth details.

⁶⁸ For information about how the relations are between these bodies and more specific tasks, see the UNFCCC webpage: <https://unfccc.int/process/bodies/the-big-picture/what-are-bodies>.

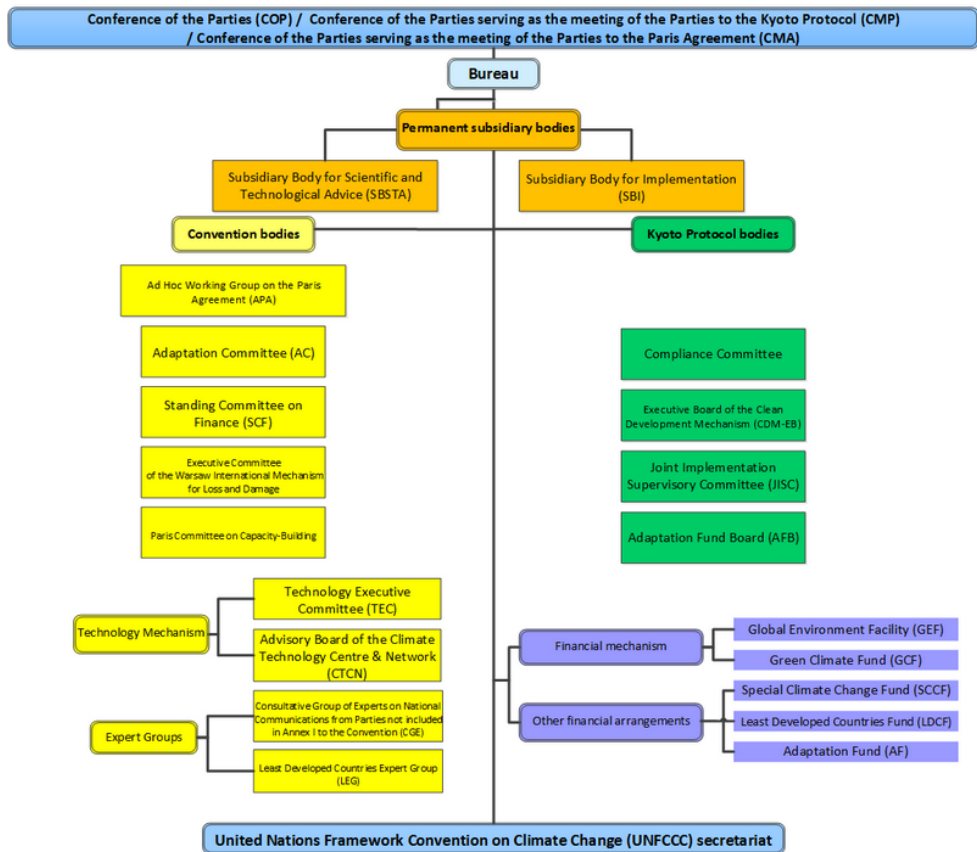


Figure 8: Structure of the bodies and processes of the UNFCCC. The figure shows how COP in reality is constituted of a number of several bodies that meet during the annual UN climate change conference (UNFCCC 2017).

Although UNFCCC member countries and Party Groupings make submissions throughout the year and several other meetings are also held, the largest event is the conference at the end of each year. Preparatory meetings begin the week before the official start and provide an opportunity for country delegations and Party groupings to gather in order to discuss strategies and positions for the coming two weeks. The first week of the official conference is when the greatest volume of detailed negotiations of text takes place, and is informally referred to as a more ‘technical’ phase of negotiations when technical teams of delegations participate in long meetings and lay the groundwork for meetings to come. The second week moves into a phase of final decision-making and a High-Level Segment, where a higher number of state leaders, ministers, politicians and heads of delegation participate in meetings. This does not

imply that the technical meetings are not political; they are indeed political since negotiators are representing and promoting the particular positions of their own countries. However, the second week is influenced by the presence of a larger number of ministers and other political leaders, and draft results from the first week's negotiations may as a consequence change as a result of the politics in the second week.

Furthermore, during the technical negotiation meetings where text is drafted to be included in the decision documents, particular meeting protocols and rules of procedures are followed. These are “standardised social forms” (Brown, Reed and Yarrow, 2017:11) that include specific terminology and ways of interaction. The second week may, however, change some of the outcomes of the first week, especially if *bilateral* agreements (a *bilateral* is a closed meeting between a party or a group with another delegation or country grouping) or political meetings outside of the negotiations are made that can influence the final texts produced for consensual adoption. The meeting schedule of each day is released very early every morning. It is therefore not possible to plan a schedule before that day, and it takes a considerable amount of coordination among delegate members throughout the entire day as changes frequently occur. Summing it up, there are certain spaces where position-making may occur on a regular basis: Firstly, within negotiation rooms at technical meetings, and secondly, outside of negotiation rooms. This leads us then to the spatial dimensions of COPs.

Size and spatial layout

The conference venues are impressive in size; at COP21 in Paris 2015, a 160,000m² space accommodated almost 40,000 people, making it the largest climate conference ever held. There were, in total, delegations from 195 countries and the EU, including 2,000 representatives from associations and NGOs, 3,000 journalists and 20,000 visitors. In comparison, around 16,000 people attended COP22 in Marrakech, and around 23,000 people attended COP23 in Bonn. During the first week of COP21, it has also been noted that over 150 formal groups for delegates only met in parallel (Christoff, 2016:773). In addition, there is also a large number of other side events open for general public, including presentations, panel discussions, launches of initiatives, exhibitions and so on. Some take place outside of the COP venue itself, for example at

hotels.

The conference venues are usually divided into different zones: 1) a zone for official UNFCCC negotiations and formal meetings, and 2) a zone for climate action events including high-level events, side events, exhibits, media activities, and sometimes delegation pavilions.⁶⁹ In order to navigate your way around at the venue, maps overlooking the area are essential, as well as following the many signs pointing delegates in the right directions. Running between the meeting rooms and zones is a daily activity, sometimes challenging, as one may have meetings at completely opposite sides of the venue and very little time between them. Moreover, the level of access to the two zones depends on what passes participants have: all participants that have access to the negotiations zone automatically get access to both zones. If only registered to the zone where side events are held, the participant does not get access to the negotiations zone. There are also different passes within a delegation that provides particular access depending on the position of the delegate.

Depending on the country hosting the conference – the COP Presidency – the exact setup and organisation of a COP and its venue change from year to year. In 2015 it was in Paris, France. In 2016 it was in Marrakech, Morocco. In 2017 the venue was in Bonn, Germany, but Fiji was officially acting as the COP Presidency. The reason for having COP23 in Bonn, as provided by the UNFCCC, was that Fiji did not have the infrastructure in place, nor the space to accommodate a conference of that size. Furthermore, because of Fiji's location in the Pacific Ocean, emissions caused by air travel would exceed the low-emissions COP vision drastically. Therefore, the Fiji COP Presidency had to find other ways to showcase its own country, as COPs are also seen as an opportunity for the hosts to do so: At COP21 in Paris, I was running between the different conference halls in what was called “the Champs Élysées”; a pathway that linked the different sections and rooms of the conference. At COP22 in Marrakech, the entry to the plenary halls were arches from traditional Islamic architecture. And so at COP23, the Fiji Presidency had taken considerable effort to make the venue more ‘Pacific style’. The zone where the negotiations took place was called the Bula Zone. *Bula* is a common Fijian greeting, but the literal meaning is ‘to live’ and can also signify

⁶⁹ See Map 3 and Map 4 in the start of the dissertation for examples from COP21 and COP23.

Fijians' strong relation to land and kinship (Toren and Pauwels 2015). Many participants and the media often mentioned the '*bula spirit*' at COP23, as it, in the words of Fiji's Chief Negotiator Nazhat Shameem Khan (2017), "infused both the formal negotiations and the climate action zone with a sense of urgency, warmth, inclusiveness and transparency". All other events took place in the Bonn Zone. Both zones were decorated with photographs of Pacific Islands and Pacific people.

At the Bonn zone there was frequent dancing and singing by the Fiji Police Band and others, especially around the large Fiji Pavilion. The Pavilion had two large Fijian style houses, one in the shape of a traditional communal meeting house and the other representing the Chief's house, the latter also serving as a regular meeting room for Fiji's Prime Minister Bainimarama. The materials for building the houses had been shipped from Fiji. Kava was mixed in a *tanoa* (wooden bowl) and served at the Fiji Pavilion daily. Every Head of State or other VIPs who visited the pavilion were served a *bilo* (the half coconut shell used for drinking kava). Furthermore, each zone had a *drua* (a Fijian double-hulled canoe) on display: the Fiji Pavilion where the negotiations took place had a large *drua* canoe at the entrance, which was the first thing delegates saw after entering. In the Bonn zone, the Fiji Pavilion had a smaller canoe outside the meeting house. The *drua* was there to remind delegates that "we are all in the same canoe when it comes to climate change" (COP23 2017b) and served as the official symbol of Fiji's Presidency. It was indeed very clear to participants that the Fijian Presidency wanted to put a distinctive Fiji mark on both physical layout and conception.

Yet, the spatial dimensions of COPs keep being a challenge, in particular for Pacific delegations that are small in size. During COP21, Morocco attended with over 400 delegates, Palau had 40 (out of which 13 were actually from Palau), while Niue had 4 and Trinidad and Tobago had 3 (McSweeney 2015). Delegates are often government officials, but also non-government representatives (from NGOs, lawyers or academia). All delegations have a Head of Delegation. If unforeseen events happen that challenge the smaller delegations' attendance, it may have a drastic effect on a small delegation. As an example, France was put in a state of emergency two weeks before the conference started because of a series of terrorist attacks in Paris on 13

November 2015, killing 130 people. Because of what was explained as a continued threat of terror, some Pacific countries chose not to attend the conference and had non-Pacific representatives instead. The size and presence of a delegation matter for many reasons. Having fewer people attend the conference, or none at all, leads to not being able to participate in decision-making that affects the country in question. Another challenge is attending the multitude of meetings occurring almost around the clock and in different ends of the venue. Running between venues, and I here speak of experience, can be a real challenge and potentially lead to missing out on important meetings.

Moreover, the costs of attending these conferences across the world can be prohibitive for Pacific countries. Pacific delegates have particularly long and costly travels, but the UNFCCC only provides funds for a limited amount of delegates to attend. Other funding in the form of grants are therefore often sought after in order to allow more people to attend, but sometimes this dependency on others to provide the money for the travel may lead to unfortunate situations. As an example, at COP22 many of the Pacific delegations experienced problems getting to the conference in time because there was an issue with the funding provided by another country. These are issues that larger wealthier countries do not necessarily need to be concerned about, as delegations are provided with all necessary funding by their national governments.

Approaching a COP through ethnographic fieldwork

In 1992, Paul Little (1995:265) carried out fieldwork at the Rio Conference (also known as the Earth Summit) and wrote a two-part analysis of the conference which at the time he considered to “open up an entire new field of ethnographic analysis”. Since then, more anthropologists have ventured into what may be called ‘the field of UN conferences’ (see for example Campbell and Brosius 2010; Chernela et al 2010; Schia 2013; Telesca 2015), yet Little’s observations are still valuable as he raises a number of reflections that can assist in contemporary ethnographic analysis. One of Little’s concerns is that if an anthropologist only focuses on the performative side of the conference, referring to the staged UN event as “designed to present a positive public face of the organization before a world audience” (1995:281), he or she may lose track of other happenings that occur at the same time, which are non-public and sometimes intangible. “Capturing the essence”, Little states about the Rio Conference, “is

problematic to say the least” (Little, 1995:281). Doing fieldwork at what he states is a “complex event” also calls in to question traditional participant observation methods because of the conference’s complexity and fragmentary nature (1995:281). One might have to ‘ethnographically delimit’ (1995:281) the research because of this. Furthermore, he also notes that these conferences are becoming increasingly available online through streaming or the sharing of documents, which adds to its complexity. Since 1992, technological developments have grown drastically, and one may say that this adds a completely new dimension to an analysis. I will return to this point later on.

For now, I wish to note that I follow Little in approaching COP as a “complex event” because his concept underlines the intensity that is associated with being present at these conferences through the sheer numbers of meetings and participants, the broad topics of discussion, and how countries organise themselves in order to officially interact with each other. It is also a “complex event” because it is so system heavy and bureaucratic in its approaches towards generating interaction and results. As an anthropologist doing fieldwork there, it takes time to get an overview of meetings and concurring events. This also applies to understanding the background for particular decisions as these can be products of discussions in previous years between particular groups and sometimes even individuals. As Little (1995:281) reasonably points out, “capturing the essence” when you cannot be everywhere at once is impossible. Therefore, my reflection and experience of attending these conferences is more focused on exploring and how to navigate your way around the conference. In a physical sense, this means choosing what meetings to attend and where to be present.

Attendance is, however, also dependent on the registered participation status.⁷⁰ My own participation in meetings was for the most part already decided as part of a government delegation (Palau), as well as my designated focus areas as part of the technical team that included Adaption and Loss & Damage. Such a system of indexicality, can, according to Little (1995:279), separate and create hierarchies through the use of credentials as a hierarchical system demarcating access to physical space. I agree, as this also questions the ability to “capture the essence” of the entire

⁷⁰ There are four groups of participation at UNFCCC meetings: 1) Government delegate, 2) Observers from UN organisations, 3) Observers from civil society and 4) Press. These categories decide where you are allowed to physically move around the conference area, and what meetings you are allowed to attend.

conference if access itself is restricted. Furthermore, ethnographic insights are dependent on what degree of access one holds. Following a Goffmanian framework, one may compare it to stages of performances where the performance is conditioned by credentials (see Goffman 1959). In that sense, I would argue that each kind of meeting (such as technical negotiations or a meeting between countries in a bilateral) is a different stage that requires a different performance, as purpose and audience change. In addition, there are also hundreds of side events that take place simultaneously, and include panel discussions, promotions, exhibitions, and much more. These are open for anyone with a pass to the zone, and therefore the audience is likely to include a broader selection of people than in the negotiations zone.

Perhaps it is useful then to approach the conference through a sort of *navigational focus*, in being aware of how the spaces that are available and unavailable may influence the insights provided and the ethnographic participation. I have found it useful to envision my own participation at the conference as one of entering layers of meanings and events, as I have navigated my way through COP time and space. This focus could also serve as framework of analysis, in order to understand how Pacific delegates themselves navigate their way around these conferences, providing performances at various levels for various audiences. Furthermore, and as I will show, the Pacific countries have themselves used the notion of voyage in describing the process of negotiations. It may be an appropriate, then, to conceptualise my own ethnographic participation in such navigational terms.

Entering the negotiation rooms: Protocol and technical process

The technical process of a COP includes the meetings where negotiators draft texts, meanings, definitions and outlines of the way ahead. These meetings provide ‘the groundwork’ for the political leadership discussions that follow. Technical meetings, however, follow quite strict protocol of negotiation and do not allow much room for speaking outside of that protocol. Certain protocols of language are adhered to when speaking (although there are different ‘negotiation styles’ and ‘intervention tactics’) as well as in writing. Negotiating language and the text in documents are as such, to a certain extent, pre-arranged and pre-agreed. Negotiators must learn the language of negotiation, which entails a particular form of communication with a particular

protocol for interaction.

Examples of this protocol can be found in the ways of making an intervention, which often starts by stating which Party the negotiator is representing: “On behalf of the G77+China group, I would like to...”, then followed up by the reason for the particular intervention. The negotiator might further continue with stating ‘the spirit’ as a reference to declaring the mood of the intervention: “In the spirit of being flexible/being clear in communication/compromise”. Negotiators may also make references to time, mentioning how much time is left for negotiations, which underlines aspects of having limited time as a negotiation tactic itself. The content or positions of the interventions are decided beforehand internally in a delegation or in the country blocks. And so these meetings are technical negotiations where text or process is discussed, and therefore they have a somewhat different format than, say, the plenary sessions where the political leadership of a country gives their positions in a statement.

I was, however, surprised by the extent to which climate negotiators rarely seem to talk explicitly about climate change itself or relate it to anything ‘on the ground’. As part of my area of responsibility on the Palau delegation’s technical team, I was assigned to follow the negotiations of the *adaptation communication*. The Paris Agreement (2015) states that “each Party should, as appropriate, submit and update periodically an adaptation communication” (Art.7, para. 10) and that it should, amongst other requirements, be submitted periodically and be recorded in a public registry starting in 2020 when the Paris Agreement enters into force. The negotiation meetings between the parties were therefore concerned with negotiating questions such as what *elements* of information should be included in the adaptation communication, and what the final communication document would look like. In other words, the discussions were concerned with the aesthetics of the document that would eventually make up the adaptation communication, this including specific negotiation on the uses of particular words. Most negotiations are about text, in the form of a discussion of what words to put where and in which documents. The example at the beginning of the chapter from the final day at COP21 exemplifies this quite well, as discussions around one word stalled the final meeting that people around the world were eagerly waiting for. The impact of a word, in that specific case *shall* instead of *should*, can be tremendous.

The adaptation communication, however, provides an interesting example because its overall goal is to provide countries with a way to document and convey information about specific concerns they have nationally regarding climate change impacts, and how they are adapting to these changes. In many ways, these are the official national stories of how life is transformed because of climate change. I therefore found it a sort of paradox that the negotiations were about finding the form in which climate change experiences should be told and how often, yet none of the negotiators used their own experiences to make a point. Put differently, these negotiation meetings are often about the form of *how* to convey and convert the national and local experiences of climate change into documents. It is *the documentation* of the issue ('the issue' in this case being climate change adaptation), but *not the issue itself*, which is in focus at negotiations (in other words, not the actual adaptation experiences).

One consequence is that this language and discussion style may create a sense of top-down forced interaction. A Pacific delegate once complained to me while reading a draft text, that "We are forced to use their language!". The delegate was annoyed by some of the words, and as I looked at the text, it was full of brackets and constituted a rather complicated English delivery. In an article from 1983, Johan Galtung suggests that this is "the culture of the UN system", leading to a situation where "some people – Westerners and Westernized non-Westerners – will feel more at home in the organisation than others" (1983:9). This, he argues, results in others becoming "servants of language-masters" (1983:9). A similar critique of hegemonic language practises in the UN is found in Little's analysis of negotiations as well, where he criticises the tedious process of agreeing over language. He argues that this "attests to the power that formal, written language has acquired in today's world political scene" (Little 1995:271). I particularly want to highlight what the delegate I quoted referred to as "their language", referring to the highly technical and complicated terminology and composition of the text. This, of course, comes in addition to the fact that the technical negotiations at COPs are carried out in English with no interpretation, and negotiating text is always drafted in English. Translations of the draft text is only translated into the other UN languages right before they are adopted or approved by

plenary sessions.⁷¹

David Mosse on the other hand, argues that this technical language is not an instrument of hegemony as such, but rather “the *only* code available for carrying out transcultural negotiations” (original emphasis, 2014:519-520). I partly agree, taking into consideration that if everyone’s experiences were to be taken into account the process might be even more tedious. Having a sort of “code for transcultural negotiations” may perhaps secure some progress, or at least an already agreed upon form of communication. If approaching it as such, the language protocol within negotiations becomes what I have chosen to call a *language in-between* of cultures and levels, where the words used in the documents follows similar forms. The UN negotiation language in this way is a vernacular language in its own right that has to be learned. Riles (2001) argues that UN documents “engenders the loss of precisely the cultural detail” and therefore is in itself free of levels, or rather, has all levels weaved together: “[W]hat the patterns in the language of the [document] represented, what we might understand as its meaning, was precisely its ‘levels’ (global, national, regional, and so on) that the designers of UN procedures so desperately sought to bring together” (Riles, 2001:91). The documents are “a form that generates its own context in the patterned levels it contains within itself” (Riles, 2001:91).

Based on her participation at the UN Conference for Women in 1995, Riles further argues that: “the document did not exist to be ‘read’ in the academic sense of the term. Rather, after the closing of the conference, governments and NGOs would *use* the document by dividing sentences into categories and reshuffling the text into material for quotation in further documents of their own” (original emphasis, 2001:89). The adaptation communication within the Paris Agreement may serve as a good example of this process. The Paris Agreement is *used* in order to continue negotiation work on sections, and to make new documents on their own. A challenge, however, is knowing the history of the words or sections in order to understand the reasoning behind the work.

That, in effect, means that the “code” (Mosse, 2014:519) or what I call ‘language in-between’ is itself a result of a particular negotiation among particular people. A

⁷¹ The official UN languages are: Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian, and Spanish.

challenge to having created a ‘language in-between’ is that the language of the UN becomes difficult to translate to those who are not part of the UN themselves, as words may have their very own histories. Recalling the critique by Minister deBrum, the ‘climate change field’ is indeed filled with convoluted ways of interacting. The UN negotiations serve as one such convoluted way of communicating climate change that is far from accessible to the broader public. This is, first, because of the terminology used, and second, because of limited accessibility. Altogether it makes up a rigid system that is based on a very particular form of interaction that particularly excludes social or cultural detail.

“But can we live with it?”

Consequently, the texts created as ‘technical work’ during negotiations leave out experiences of climate change. Again, there seems to be a discrepancy between the document and everyday experiences. Riles (2001:87) in that regard suggests that negotiation language itself is both abstract and concrete. The language never points to a particular instance of something, Riles argues, even though delegates had available an incredible amount of information that would support the inclusion of particular text. Yet the language that was included in documents was never on a specific level. Riles (2001:89) here points to “the difference between the specificity of the facts outside of the document and the generality of the facts within the document [that] defined a distance between the inside of the text and the inside of the coffee bar where delegates gathered to talk about their amendments”. This reflects my own COP experiences quite well, in that lived experiences of climate change were not talked about in negotiation rooms even though many negotiators were considered some of the foremost national climate change experts, including highly educated and experienced people with empirical insights on climate change impacts.

It follows that the negotiations and official meetings do not accommodate the sharing of experiences. That may be a problem, particularly considering that different countries have distinctive climate change challenges, and thus dissimilar experiences. One such example is the case of Article 8 of the Paris Agreement concerning loss and damage caused by climate change impacts, where there is not a clear definition of what exactly constitutes loss and damage. The consequence is that there is a lack of

understanding of how loss and damage can actually impact people's everyday lives. For Pacific delegations, however, the loss of crops to saltwater intrusion, or damage to their houses after yet another category 5 storm, are not difficult phenomena to relate to. For them, loss and damage are concrete events with concrete consequences. This inadequacy also pervades the discussions around the limit of 2 degree or 1.5 degree temperature rise in the Paris Agreement: in a concrete sense, these numbers represent drastic changes to life as many Pacific islanders know it. Changes are already happening, and the projected impacts on island states caused by a global 1.5°C temperature increase are grave (see IPCC 2018).

For the SIDS of the world, including the ambition of 1.5°C in the Paris Agreement was therefore crucial. Yet they found themselves in a sort of 'Catch 22' situation, caught between global politics and local consequences: if the small islands pushed 1.5°C, fewer countries would support them, which would mean having *less* influence on the negotiations overall. If they settled on 2°C, *more* countries would potentially be willing to support them, but that would mean more severe impacts and consequences for the islands and their homes. This existential dilemma captures much of the essence of climate change challenges for Pacific Islanders. While discussing this situation during a meeting for SIDS at COP21, a delegate therefore asked: "But can we live with it? This is not about politics, this is about climate change and survival". This underlines the existential discussions going on for Small Island Developing States at these meetings: it is not just about politics; it is far more than that. The island countries are negotiating for a future which they can actually live in. Negotiations for small island countries are not only about 'settling differences' in the sense where a 'language in-between' can be met for everyone. For small island countries it is a matter of whether or not they can physically live with the consequences of the decisions that are being made at COPs. I therefore now turn to how Pacific delegates are trying to get this point across to others who do not face the same existential crisis.

Pacific representation of climate change

During COP21 I attended a side event at the AOSIS pavilion called "We the Pacific". It was organised by Pacific Islands Climate Action Network (PICAN) and the Pacific

Islands Development Forum (PIDF), and the event was described as a *talanoa* between Pacific Heads of State, civil society and others. The concept of *talanoa* is predominantly found in Tonga, Fiji, Tokelau and Samoa, and it means to talk, discuss or ‘tell stories’ (Tunufa’i, 2016:229). *Talanoa* is a form of a form of oral communication between people, and it has been argued that “it allows contextual interaction with Pacific participants to occur that creates a more authentic knowledge, which may lead to solutions for Pacific issues” (Vaiotei 2006:23). It has, however, received some critique regarding its applicability as a pan-Pacific concept because of differences in meaning and that the term is not used in many of the other Pacific Islands (see Tunufa’i 2016:233-235). Nevertheless, the format of the “We the Pacific” side event at COP21 was a *talanoa* that gathered Pacific representatives from across the region to discuss matters concerning Pacific Islands and climate change.

The panel consisted of a Pacific youth representative, Prime Minister of Tuvalu Enele Sopoaga, then President of Kiribati Anote Tong, and Fiji’s Minister for Agriculture, Rural & Maritime Development (now Fiji’s High Level Climate Champion) Inia Seruiratu. Side events like these are numerous during the two weeks of the conference, and in all the three COPs I have attended, I have been impressed by the participation of Pacific leadership despite their hectic schedules. It shows, however, that many Pacific state leaders prioritise and see the value of attending such side events outside of political meetings and that are directed at a broader COP audience. Side events open up the possibility to speak more freely than in meetings and negotiations, outside of protocol. In some respects, side events are even seen to be more productive than negotiations, because they provide Pacific delegates with opportunities to speak to a broader audience, ask questions, show images, have performances, and have a more interactive dialogue in the form of a *talanoa*.

Upon entering the small room for the “We the Pacific” side event, everyone was given a frangipani flower. The audience consisted of many people from the Pacific Islands, but also several journalists, TV crews and many more. One of first speakers was President Tong. As he approached the podium, the sound of camera shutters spread across the room. “The purpose of this event”, he then said, “is to represent what climate change means for us in that part of the world”. And by that statement, he set the tone

for the rest of the discussions by underlining how important it is to explain in Pacific Islanders' own words what climate change actually means for their daily lives. Taking the stage after President Tong, Prime Minister Sopoaga furthered a similar view by saying that “the 2 degrees target will only save economies. (...) 1.5 degrees or below is to save our people”. He thereby made the direct link between scientific projections and the lived realities of Pacific people.

Furthermore, “We the Pacific” was not just the name of the event, but it was also a movement organised by Greenpeace Pacific. The aim of the movement was to bring stories from the Pacific Islands to Paris and COP21 through using social media, as described by one of the organisers:

It gives our people a chance to deliver their messages of genuine island strength, unity and determination to a global audience! Every single message shared on social media with the hashtag #WeThePacific will be shown during the Conference in Paris, sending messages from grassroots level to those who are out there making the big decisions (Long 2016).

So while the panellists were sitting at the front, a large screen behind them showed a video of a large collection of photographs and video clips collected by Pacific Islanders around the world. They were all holding a sign saying #WeThePacific. Some further encouraged their Pacific leaders to “Stay strong” and provided messages of support such as: “I stand with the Pacific”.



Photo 10: “I stand with the Pacific”. This photograph was only one by many that were shown during the side event, with #WeThePacific (Talanoa 2016).

As exemplified through this image, #WeThePacific is also a reference to the desire of

not being belittled through being spoken for by others. It may also reflect a sense of not being taken seriously in terms of the experiences and fears Pacific Islanders have in relation to climate change impacts.

These messages underline the strong desire among Pacific Islanders for self-representation and self-determination of their lives and their futures. Social media has furthermore provided Pacific Islanders who cannot attend the COPs themselves a channel to voice their concerns. #WeThePacific has been used in the following COPs as well, in 2016 and 2017. The use of social media at an event like this shows how it is possible to portray local realities and thereby including multiple levels and locations simultaneously. The entanglements of global and local are thereby manifested in a small room at a side event where Pacific leadership and ‘the grassroots’ engage with audiences from around the world, thus creating a ‘world stage’ for Pacific people. The local stories and global narratives of climate change are strategically converged.

Pacific position-making and climate diplomacy

“*Waa* is blood vessels, *Waa* is canoe, *Waa* is people. ... We are the vessels that carry forth the strength or the mana for our place”, Joakim Peter of the Micronesian islands of Chuuk said at the Waves of Change conference in 2013, as described in Chapter 6. His vision was that the concept of *Waa* ‘canoe’ provides the foundation needed to share the local stories of climate change, thereby changing its global narrative. There is a multitude of potential that lies embedded in such a concept. It encapsulates notions of cosmology and epistemology, as well as relations and entanglements. It is about place, people, strength and voyage, and how these are all connected. If applied as a way to connect the people and stories about climate change from Oceania with the rest of the world, the *waa* concept may in extension be seen as a form of diplomacy.

The COP, I argue, provides an arena where such a distinctive Pacific climate diplomacy is acted out and made visible in its most perceptible form. It is a kind of diplomacy, as elaborated on in Chapter 6, that wishes to include what Minister deBrum called “the real people at home” and that underlines a need for greater contextualization, as called for by Prime Minister Sopoaga. Important also, as highlighted by the Prime Minister of Cook Islands, Henry Puna, is to “define ourselves on our own terms” and thereby moving away from the categorisations of being victims,

vulnerable or weak. So instead of the belittlement of the Pacific Islands Hau'ofa (1994) noted, there is a strong desire to “lead by example” as so frequently underlined by President Remengesau of Palau in Chapter 4.

This diplomatic effort involves recognising the spaces of opportunity. Although there are some challenges for Pacific delegations in attending COP and within the UNFCCC, there are also opportunities. In his analysis of the UN system, Galtung (1983:18) points out three opportunities in particular that are relevant for smaller participating countries. The first opportunity is that the UN offers countries protection and legitimacy. Second, countries are provided with an opportunity to articulate concerns internationally, and the UN has to recognise these concerns. Smaller countries are provided an opportunity to give their statements and express opinions just as any other country. Furthermore, if the UN event organises side events, such as “We The Pacific”, open up the possibility to speak to a broad range of interested audiences. Smaller countries have as such an opportunity to be vocal, heard and to discuss with others. This leads to the third point made by Galtung, that small countries are also able to build networks at UN events. Galtung argues that because the UN system puts all states, formally speaking, on an equal footing, it creates “a challenge to the stronger states and a golden opportunity as a setting for the smaller ones to organize their interest group” (Galtung 1983:4).

I have seen the importance of G77+China and AOSIS play out through such groupings allowing small countries to gain a greater voice in negotiations based on the group's large number of member countries. Moreover, climate change discussions also mirror the severity of impacts of climate change as unequally experienced around the world. AOSIS member countries often share many of the same challenges related to climate change, which makes the group an important forum to share experiences. However, sharing similar impacts does not necessarily mean that the countries share the same goals or opinions. It may therefore sometimes be difficult to uphold a collective voice throughout negotiations on all topics. Furthermore, geopolitics may come into play and influence the way various countries or regions cooperate.

Perhaps that is why the Pacific regional group has become increasingly more important and prominent during climate negotiations. The COP23 Fiji Presidency was

recognised as an achievement for *all* Pacific Islands, being labelled the first ever ‘Pacific COP’. Fiji received important support from the entire region when announcing its bid for Presidency. It was an example of the strengthened Pacific regionalism extending beyond the Pacific Ocean and the result of several years of planning and work. The Pacific countries started to meet regularly months before COP21. This was, according to several delegates I spoke to, the first time country representatives had gathered in such a regional way with the concrete aim of preparing for the COP conference. Regional organisations and institutions, such as SPREP and USP, furthermore arranged negotiations training ahead of the conference, a task they continue to fulfil. During COP21, COP22 and COP23 regular meetings for the Pacific SIDS countries were held to further strategize and collaborate on key issues. Several Pacific delegates expressed to me that this was a positive undertaking that increased coordination. In this way the countries could push forward positions in a more coordinated fashion to AOSIS and other larger country blocks speaking on behalf of the PSIDS in negotiations. The PSIDS coordination meetings are now a regular scheduled series of events at COPs for the Pacific delegates.

It should however be noted that a regional approach is not without its challenges for Pacific countries. Nicollette Goulding (2015) points to issues such as contrasting views and difficulties with the fragmentation of the UNFCCC. A similar argument is put forward by George Carter (2015), who notes the historically dominating voices of the Caribbean countries in and through AOSIS. This is also reflected in the lack of research on the potential of coalition diplomacy and the Pacific region, Carter (2015) argues. As a consequence, according to Goulding, Pacific countries are seeking new forums and coalitions where their voices may be heard (2015:201-202). I suggest the High Ambition Coalition during COP21 provides an example of how Pacific countries are actively trying to find ways to position themselves within the climate change negotiations at large. I also wish to add the importance of having certain Pacific people serving as front figures for position-making initiatives.

The panellists at the “We the Pacific” side event were becoming what one could almost categorise as ‘the usual suspects’ in that they took on so many highly visible roles during the climate negotiations. The Presidents, Prime Ministers and lead

negotiators of many Pacific states, and in particular of the atoll countries, are strong voices and visible key actors. However, they do not only act as stand-alone individuals, but rather form a more gathered front as they perform in noticeably synchronized ways through speeches and public participation. One may say that they form a sort of 'Pacific climate relation system' where the purpose and relation exists, but the people may change, as shown through the passing of Tony deBrum. Minister deBrum was of major importance to Pacific people and many others involved in climate change work, and served as a strong advocate for the Pacific in climate discussions.

Furthermore, former President Anote Tong's reached the maximum number of presidential terms in 2016 and could therefore not be re-elected as President of Kiribati. Tong has been one of the most vocal Pacific leaders on climate change matters, making climate change his main cause and presidential legacy. He is nevertheless still politically active and attends COPs on his own initiative and not as President. Propitiously, many other prominent Pacific figures have increasingly risen to the challenge. Today, President of the Marshall Islands, Hilda Heine, Ambassador of Palau to the UN, Olai Uludong, Fiji's Ambassador for Climate Change and Oceans (and Director General for the Melanesian Spearhead Group) Amena Yauvoli, to mention just a few, are collaborating on behalf of the region and further pushing the Pacific agenda forward.

Using the rise of the sustainable development narrative as an example of how concepts have emerged in the past, Little (1995:279) argues that these transnational mega-event conferences are a place for "the elaboration of new political cosmological principles". Extending this idea to the area of climate change, Amity Doolittle (2010) further highlights the importance for indigenous representatives at the UN to share their knowledge and experiences. As Doolittle (2010:287) states, "to many indigenous leaders, climate change presents an opportunity to demand recognition of their rights and their experience-based knowledge, drawing attention to the value of their traditions and cultural systems". Following Doolittle's point, I would similarly argue that for Pacific delegates, the sharing of climate change stories is an opportunity to demand global recognition. Furthermore, such story-sharing provides an opportunity beyond recognition, in terms of what Little refers to as an elaboration of "new political

cosmological principles”.

Participating in the elaboration of new principles – such as loss and damage – that have no clear definition, thus becomes vitally important for Pacific delegations. A lack of understanding of such concepts makes Pacific experiences even more relevant, as it provides them with an opportunity to influence the development and refinement of new (and existing) principles and their definitions. Realising this as a strategy for position-making and Pacific climate diplomacy, it reflects the growing ‘COP vernacular’ or COP knowledge amongst the Pacific delegations, as argued in Chapters 3 and 6. I here apply Niels Nagelhus Schia’s (2013) definition of local knowledge at the UN Security Council (UNSC) as something that can be mastered or learned. Schia (2013:148) argues that “local knowledge in the UNSC means knowing how to master the relationship between “instructions”, “influence”, “work culture”, and the “dynamics in that small meeting room”. Similarly, Pacific delegates are learning to master the importance of creating new relations based on recognising knowledge gaps in the understanding of climate change principles. They are aiming to fill such gaps through sharing stories and contextualising concepts, and Pacific delegates have found a space where there is a need for their stories.

It should then be noted that environmental damage from climate change are not the only losses looming for Pacific Islanders – there may be cultural and social losses as well. Adger et al (2011:1) notes that there are many “cultural and non-material impacts” of climate change, and that a loss of place equals a loss of identity and social capital. It is therefore important that a potential future loss of place is factored into climate change decision-making. Yet, as the history of negotiations has shown, a loss and damage article was barely included in the Paris Agreement after years of discussions.⁷² Part of the difficulty, I believe, is that a lot of what is lost cannot be seen or measured, as losses are cultural and social. Adger et al. (2011:20) therefore suggest looking at the possibilities within the institutions and the political processes because they “create the space and mechanisms by which values in identity and sense of place

⁷² Although loss and damage made it into a separate article in the Paris Agreement, discussions have been ongoing on the issue since AOSIS first highlighted it in the drafting of the UNFCCC. Years later, the Warsaw mechanism was established, but left out important issues of blame and liability, which can potentially lead to developed countries having to pay compensation for developing countries. In the Paris Agreement, Article 8 takes up loss and damage, but still does not include a clarification on compensation or liability.

can be incorporated into the calculus of climate change”. I argue that Pacific delegations at COP meetings have developed such a strategy, and that it draws on forms of ‘culturalisation’.

Pacific Climate Diplomacy Strategy

Having been able to participate in the daily lives of Pacific Islanders at ‘sea level’, and then to travel with some of them from the Pacific region to COP21 in Paris, COP22 in Marrakesh, and COP23 in Bonn, has been an intriguing ethnographic experience. This experience has enhanced my understanding of perplexities across levels and scales, and brought to light some of the important ways climate change knowledges travel, are transformed, and are created. This has been possible by applying a method that allowed my fieldwork to expand over time and actively follow interlocutors and discourses. In that regard, I have particularly been struck by how Pacific delegations have managed to increasingly ‘culturalise’ parts of the climate conferences over time, in its most apparent form through the Fijian COP23 Presidency’s decoration of the conference venue in Bonn.

In a Reuters news article, it emerged that the Fijian decorations were part of a targeted strategy of ‘bringing Fiji to Germany’, leading to other delegates dubbing the conference “Fiji-on-the-Rhine”:

The first small island state to preside at U.N. climate negotiations since they began in the 1990s, Fiji has enlivened a conference centre with canoes, dancers, huge photographs of palm-fringed islands, virtual reality shows and flowers.

Some delegates at the 200-nation, Nov. 6-17 meeting dub the riverside venue “Fiji-on-the-Rhine”, a contrast to the grey November skies outside in Bonn, Germany. Fiji says “we are all in the same canoe” in confronting climate change. ...

We wanted to think ‘how do we bring Fiji to Germany?’” co-director Kvakvaku Aning said. “Short of being able to smell it, or feel the rain or the sun on you, this is the best thing”. Many delegates say *the Fijian approach makes an often abstract debate about greenhouse gas emissions more real*. “It delivers a really stark message,” said Elina Bardram, Head of the European Commission delegation (my emphasis, Doyle 2017).

As becomes clear in this quote, ‘bringing Fiji to Germany’ goes beyond decorations. The Fijian ‘culturalisation’ of negotiations is also about making the abstract “more real”, as noted by the European Commission delegate. It is localising “an often abstract

debate” through showcasing a particular place and by infusing negotiations with Pacific images, terms and concepts.



Figure 9: “Fiji-on-the-Rhine”. The Fijian COP23 Presidency featured in a news article by Reuters, emphasising how negotiations have been ‘turned into Fiji’ by decorating the venue with palm trees, canoes, flowers and dancers. Here, showing the Fiji Pavilion. (Doyle 2017)

By using the word ‘culturalisation’ I do not wish to put forward an argument drawing on culturalism as such, in which culture is seen in a deterministic fashion. Rather, I use it in order to describe the approach and style of diplomacy that became increasingly more apparent from COP21 in 2015 to COP23 in 2017. It is perhaps best explained through Fiji’s own visions for COP23, as stated on their official website:

Fiji’s vision is for a Presidency that is transparent and inclusive of all, advances the Paris Agreement and accelerates climate action for vulnerable societies, drawing on our own experiences as a small island developing state in the Pacific. ...

To infuse COP23 with the Fijian “Bula Spirit” of inclusiveness, friendliness and solidarity and promote the Pacific concept of talanoa. This is a process of inclusive, participatory and transparent dialogue that builds empathy and leads to decision making for the collective good. It is not about finger pointing and laying blame but is about listening to each other, learning from each other, sharing stories, skills and experiences. By focusing on the benefits of action, this process will move the global climate agenda forward (COP23 2018a).

Noteworthy in Fiji’s COP23 vision is that it specifically states ‘own experiences’ as a

source of advancing action on the Paris Agreement, as well as to ‘infuse’ the “Bula spirit” into negotiations through “the Pacific concept of talanoa”. This involved incorporating the Talanoa Dialogue as a formal speaking forum, providing for a considerably more conversational form than other protocol heavy meetings, as the aim of Talanoa Dialogue is to share (climate) stories. The Talanoa Dialogue also includes participation from researchers, activists, government representatives, and many more. It serves as a significant example of how Pacific-style concepts have been introduced into formal procedures at COPs. Other similar examples include kava sessions, storytelling, as well as gift giving. Examples include gifting the coconut husk pin to every new member of HAC, and that the *drua* outside the Fiji Pavilion was on the final day of COP23 gifted away from the Fiji Presidency to the Major of the state of North Rhine-Westphalia.

Paradoxically, these social procedures are considered *informal protocol* at COP but are largely considered to be part of what one may call *formal* or *traditional protocol* in many Pacific countries. In order to explore these issues further in the following sections of this chapter, I ask two guiding questions: Why do Pacific delegates strive to incorporate elements of Pacific sociality and culture into the UN climate negotiations? Furthermore, why are Pacific island countries provided the space to do so in the heavily protocol dominated system of COPs?

The power and expectations of climate change experience

Concerning the first question, and drawing on discussions in Chapter 3, I argue that the Pacific stories about climate change are believed to ‘be real’ because manifestations of climate change through physical impacts are already present in the Pacific and are visible for Pacific Islanders. But perhaps more importantly in this regard, is that these climate change manifestations experienced by Pacific Islanders are believed to be real by others (meaning non-Pacific islanders) who are in potential positions of power to provide Pacific Islanders with space to voice their concerns. This is, I would argue, because Pacific countries and the region as a whole ‘has a lot of climate change’, referring here to the discussions of climate change-ness in previous chapters. As a consequence, Pacific Islanders’ increased diplomatic position may be connected to having the experienced and embodied knowledge of climate change – as opposed to

something abstract (like it was for the EU delegate just mentioned), but as lived experience.

As Fiji's COP23 vision exemplifies, there is a belief among Fijians – and, from my own observations, in many other Pacific countries as well – that drawing on their very own Pacific experiences of climate change is essential in strategies of climate diplomacy. I suggest this relates to a kind of power that lies in having a kind of 'believed authenticity', and I paraphrase Dimitrios Theodossopoulos (2013:339), in that this form of authenticity is one that embeds expectations of what truthful experiences of climate change are. Drawing on their experiences as Pacific Islanders who 'have a lot of climate change' and therefore truthful experiences and knowledge, can, therefore, assist in providing Pacific representatives with increasing room to speak out at negotiations.

Storytelling: Filling knowledge gaps and making place relevant

My second question relates to the roles of stories and storytelling. These narrative and rhetorical genres serve as important tools for creating the relation required in order to get others to understand what climate change means for Pacific islanders. As shown in Chapter 4, there are long traditions of storytelling in Pacific societies, and stories tend to be seen as belonging to particular people and places. The sharing of a story should therefore not be underestimated in terms of its potential as a powerful tool to connect climate change to a place and a people, particularly when experiences are told in a personal and visual way. Returning again to Selina's speech at the closure of COP21, it serves as an effective example:

I remember, back when I was six or seven, my grandpa, told me a story about our islands being submerged by water. I had never been scared of the water because I practically grew up surrounded by it, but I remember it was during those moments where I felt immense fear by the water. It dawned on me as I would stand on that only one road on Majuro that on my left is water, and on my right is water. I am surrounded by water.

What Selina is doing here, I argue, is placing her knowledge of a rising sea with the elder, her grandfather, always a knowledgeable figure in Pacific societies. Through his experience in life and his knowledge about the island and the ocean, he tells her about the things to come. As she grew up, she herself witnessed these things and experienced

them, and it becomes clear for her that the grandfather was speaking the truth about their situation. The water, which always has been an important source of life, is suddenly a source of fear. This fear is visualized through her example of standing on the road, surrounded on both sides by what for her is now dangerous water.

Creating such a mental image of how it is to live with this kind of fear of sea level rise, a fear that ultimately is the essence of experienced climate change, is an example of a way to contextualise climate change through stories of its impact. The stories fill gaps, so to speak, in knowledge about experiencing climate change in what otherwise can be quite an abstract discussion. What Pacific representatives are aiming to achieve by this kind of strategy, is, ultimately, a practice of climate diplomacy that will support their positions and needs.

In his book about diplomatic practices and knowledge in Norway's Ministry for Foreign Affairs (MFA), Iver Neumann (2012) has shown how diplomats may produce new knowledge in order to obtain conceptual power. He argues that such conceptual power makes it possible to establish new diplomatic practices, here explained through Norway's relationship with Russia (2012:176):

[C]hanges in the overall political discourse opened up the possibility of new practices. Key personnel at the Norwegian MFA responded by improvising a new practice. Stories of historic friendship between Russians and Norwegians, cut short by Soviet power, were written by researchers at the behest of the Norwegian MFA, and created a social field inside which the new practice could emerge. By producing and fielding new knowledge, the MFA wielded conceptual power that made possible the establishment of a new practice. This new practice was then established in the face of opposition from the "discourse police," particularly inside the Norwegian MFA. As a result, Norwegian diplomatic discourse changed.

What Neumann describes here concerns the changing of both internal and external political discourse regarding the Norway-Russia relationship. Although his argument is more internally oriented within the MFA, compared to the use of stories by Pacific delegates for what one could call external purposes, Neumann's analysis highlights a good example of how, by presenting 'new' knowledge, one has the power to change diplomatic discourse and practice. For Pacific countries, this means that producing and sharing stories of climate change can provide the contextualisation needed to change discourses around issues such as loss and damage or the 1.5/2°C, where there are clearly conceptual gaps in discourse and acceptable practice between countries.

Before explaining how this contextualisation is possible through the use of particular forms of rhetoric, it should be noted that a storytelling approach at COP does also have its limitations. By that I mean that it is mostly limited to certain arenas, as the sharing of a story inside technical negotiation rooms where protocol should be followed is neither encouraged nor preferred as a technique. Rather, the storytelling approach, as I will show below, is more useful outside of negotiation rooms, as a part of official statements, or at side events where there is a more informal tone of speaking and the audience is more diverse.

Making place relevant through storytelling

Previous research has shown that indigenous activism at the UN is making use of particular forms of rhetoric linked to identity and knowledge as a political tool in negotiations. From environmental studies, Amity Doolittle (2010) looks at how indigenous peoples' groups gain political recognition in climate change negotiations based on ideas of identity and environmental knowledge. Some of this rhetoric has been based on essentialising indigenous knowledge, in order to make a claim of having valuable knowledge based on indigenous peoples' special relationship with their environment. She argues: "Their narratives, metaphors and stories about the earth can be understood as rhetorical devices that allow them to authenticate and validate their role as legitimate and knowledgeable participants in the climate change negotiations" (2010:290). This rhetoric may, however, be altered depending on the situation, for example in discussions around specific programs such as REDD, Doolittle points out, to focus more on "shared histories of marginalisation and dispossession" (2010:287).

Anthropologist Andrea Muehlebach, however, argues that indigenous groups at the UN Working Group on Indigenous Populations (WGIP) are taking an approach of "place-making", where "indigenous place" is "used as a *conceptual tool* in transnational political practice, developed for political use and effectiveness" (original emphasis, 2001:416). But there has also been a shift in rhetoric, she notes, going from morality to underlining valuable knowledge: "The indigenous politics of place ... has shifted from a politics of morality to a politics that frames morality in a new terminology consisting of the notion of valuable knowledge in the service of biodiversity" (2001:418). Regardless, for Muehlebach, "international indigenous

activism was and is always about (...) territory” (2001:416). This is linked to “the right to self-determination” and is “the fundamental basis upon which indigenous activism must be analyzed” (2001:416).

Interestingly, claims and references to indigenous rights has *not* dominated the Pacific countries’ rhetorical strategies explicitly directed to COP climate negotiations. Yet, Pacific countries have large indigenous populations, and there are overall similarities in rhetorical strategy between Pacific Islanders and other indigenous groups that attend UN events. In particular, there is in both cases a tendency to put forward the strategic essentialising of knowledge, issues of place-based identity and politics of morality – though for Pacific Islanders, not necessarily as valuable knowledge related to biodiversity, as in the case examined by Muehlebach, but rather by the moral imperative of making wrongs right.

In order to gain a deeper understanding of the rhetoric used among Pacific speakers, I have reviewed the contents of Pacific statements at the Leaders Event and High-Level Segment of COP21 and COP23, to identify some general trends. At COP21 there was a strong tendency in the speeches by Pacific representatives to underline the world’s moral plight of assisting small island states and developing countries. In statements given during the High-Level Segment opening of COP23, the Pacific speeches strongly underlined their support and sense of pride for Fiji as holding the conference Presidency. As an example, Prime Minister of the Republic of Vanuatu Charlot Salwai Tabimasmal (2017) was particularly grateful in his speech that Fiji brought with them “Pacific Island values, strength and vision” to the negotiations. Pacific countries do, as examples show, draw on culture as a rhetorical grip, in ways that are similar to what other indigenous peoples do. It is, however, particularly *Pacific* targeted.

Most Pacific Islanders are in fact not indigenous minorities in sovereign states, but exercise state sovereignty themselves at the country level.⁷³ This is, I believe, an

⁷³ This means that Pacific Islands are participating at the negotiations as Member Parties, as individual countries, as opposed to the UN category group of Indigenous Peoples. Indigenous issues are, however, very relevant for Pacific island countries, both on national levels and as an international issue at COP or the UN more broadly. This is because of ongoing indigenous complexities within the Pacific region itself. In Fiji there has been a long-standing dispute regarding land ownership and governance leading to tensions between indigenous Fijians and the Indo-Fijians. In New Caledonia, a long-lasting political debate concerning independence and land ownership for the indigenous population *Kanak*. A final example includes ongoing

important point, as it allows for Pacific peoples and their sovereign states to engage with other states at a level of equal parties. Quite simply, Pacific Islanders may as a rule speak on behalf of a country and not on behalf of an indigenous group. This can explain why Pacific countries have not made a more noticeable push for indigenous rights at COPs. Issues related to territory are nevertheless still relevant, as ultimately the impacts of climate change, such as sea level rise, may challenge territorial sovereignty, which, in the history of the Pacific Islands, is a quite recent establishment. As expressed by President Loeak of the Marshall Islands (2015) at the COP21 Leaders Event: “My country is in its hour of need. Like any other country, we cannot, and will not go along with an agreement that signs our sovereignty away.”

The principle of being equal to other states also provides Pacific countries with opportunities to make use of other forms of powerful rhetoric – not as “place-making” (Muehlebach 2001), considering how Pacific countries in practice have equal place in negotiations, but rather as an approach of ‘making place relevant’. The most fitting example of this is what has become almost a catch phrase at UN climate conferences, which is “If we save Tuvalu, we save the world”, as famously said by Prime Minister Sopoaga during COP15 in 2009. This sentence is still used by Tuvalu delegates, and notably also widely used by others, such as UN Secretariat representatives. The first time I took notice of this was while attending the opening plenary meeting during COP21, at which the Chair in particular thanked Tuvalu for being there, making a direct reference to Sopoaga’s statement. It was repeated again later the same day during the Leaders Event by Sopoaga himself (2015) as he finished his keynote by saying:

This is the time. We must all stand together and reshape our future. A new, comprehensive treaty on climate change is in our reach. Let’s do it now. Let’s do it for the future of humanity.

Let’s do it for Tuvalu. For if we save Tuvalu we save the world.

What are the effects of such rhetorical approaches and position-making strategies? First of all, Tuvalu is made relevant for the future of the entire world. A

tensions in West Papua. This conflict is between Indonesian and indigenous peoples in New Guinea. Claims of genocidal campaigns by Indonesia against indigenous inhabitants has made an impact on the broader Pacific region, and many Pacific countries are strong advocates for West Papua independence. I mention these examples to highlight that even though Pacific countries at COPs do not explicitly apply indigenous arguments in statements, indigenous debates are regionally important.

strong connection is made between Tuvalu's challenges and finding solutions to negative climate change impacts, thereby to save humanity. Tuvalu is placed at the front of a global opportunity to show leading climate action, and also encouraging others to do the same. Tuvalu is showing the way for other countries, and thereby executing what should be considered as climate change leadership. Second, the statement plays on the idea of climate change-ness and measuring climate change. Rather than victimising Tuvalu, the statement is used as an advantage. It uses the idea that Tuvalu is 'at the frontline' of climate change impacts, or rather, the high-end on the scale of climate change-ness as a sort of measuring-point of the world. Tuvalu becomes a way of measuring the success of outcomes at climate negotiations, and in that sense Tuvalu may be considered a metonym of the world itself, thereby exemplifying the potential a small island state may have in terms of its inverted proportional presence at the negotiations.

Informalising the formal

Moving on to a third reason for why and how Pacific delegates incorporate Pacific sociality and culture into the UN climate negotiations, I return a final time to Selina. One reason why this chapter starts with Selina's speech, is because the speech itself came as a surprise in the very final meeting at COP21. Her speech was unexpected by nearly everyone in the plenary hall. Her voice therefore easily stood out among the many speakers that normally talk in such a setting, hence changing what is considered as the formal protocol during a COP plenary meeting. It had direct impact, as seen by the reactions of the people in the room. Throughout all the final speeches preceding that of the Marshall Islands, people had been walking around, talking, taking photos, and buzzing in the background of whoever was giving a statement at the time. Yet, as soon as Selina took the microphone, it made them stop and listen to who was talking and what she had to say.

In its unexpected form, one could say that Selina's speech was an *informalisation of the formal protocol* and that was what made it stand out. Delegates I talked to moreover seemed to remember other acts and speeches that had been outside of protocol, particularly those instances that had appealed to emotions. I was told about

negotiators who had broken down in tears after days of negotiating. Breaking down crying was not a frequent occurrence, but nevertheless informal and unexpected in an event that follows strict formal protocol.

In his analysis of how small states influence decision-making at the UN Security Council, Nils Nagelhus Schia (2013:138) shows how it may be more useful to focus on what he calls informal culture and the roles of individuals rather than formal outputs. Using Norway's non-permanent membership in the Security Council in 2001-2002 as an example, Schia explores how the Norwegian mission through an informal approach (as opposed to the bureaucratic) was able to be more effective in influencing decisions. Moreover, this informal approach "triggered creative solutions among the delegated because there was no time to deal with the cases according to formal Rules of Procedure" (Schia, 2013:143). For an effective outcome, Schia (2013:144) suggests, there is a need for a certain amount of "plasticity" that influences and changes procedures. Yet, here the human factor and dynamics between people play a very important role as well, Schia argues. This shows what he calls "the institutional paradox" where within such a system heavy institution, it still comes down to "the delegate with the microphone" and the human factor (Schia, 2013:148). Schia thus shows how the informal 'creative solutions' may serve as strategies among smaller states. Relating that message to COP and climate negotiations, Pacific delegates' actions and initiatives may be seen to extend the "plasticity" of climate diplomacy and protocol.



Photo 11: The delegate microphone. Sitting behind the microphone as a Party delegate provides speaking time. Here illustrated from the Palau delegation's point of view at COP22.

Reflecting on the procedures that lead to the Paris Agreement at COP21, Peter Christoff (2016:769-772) argues that we are seeing an overall widening frame of climate diplomacy that opens up for a broader recognition of who the important players are. According to Christoff, in recent years negotiations have opened up more for non-state actors (2016:769). I therefore suggest that the combination of an informal strategy and a recent widening frame of diplomacy may provide the needed space for new expressions of diplomacy, including those developed by Pacific Islanders. These expressions consist of forms that are not necessarily built on traditional diplomatic protocol, but rather open up the concept, allowing for cultural influence and human agency. Selina's surprise speech and Minister deBrum's role in creating the High Ambition Coalition can be said to support Christoff's observation. Minister deBrum was a key initiator for the HAC group that in the final week of negotiations on the Paris Agreement helped secure its success. Returning briefly to Schia, he argues that "it is not enough to look at organizational structures to understand the roles of small states in international politics; it is also important to understand who does what, with whom, and why" (2013:150). Now, I argue that 'the *who*' in the story of the Coalition at COP21 is deBrum himself, as he assumed a leadership role for the growing group of HAC countries. The *what*, *whom* and *why* are somewhat more difficult to fully comprehend, as much of the work happened behind doors beyond my level of participation. However, some events that took place in the making of the High Ambition Coalition were possible to follow by talking to other delegates, observing and through the news. Two of these types of events I now wish to explore further: Gifting and Informal kava sessions.

Gifting

The way new members joined the Coalition caught my immediate attention, as I am sure it would for any scholar interested in the Pacific. Every new member had to personally approach deBrum, as described here by the former Marshall Islands negotiator: "We made it very clear to all those who wanted to be part of us – this was personal. No emails, you had to come to our delegation office, shake hands and look at us in the eye" (King 2015). Through this form of required personal protocol, I was reminded of the importance of visiting the chief as one enters a village in Fiji and

elsewhere in the Pacific, as a basic sign of respect. Worth taking note of, is that talking face to face is also an important feature of *talanoa* in Fiji. When visiting a village, the visitor comes with a gift, *sevusevu* (kava root bundle), to give to the head of the village. However, as new Coalition members approached deBrum during COP21, the Marshall Islands minister was in fact the one who gave a gift to all new members: a pin made of coconut husk from the Marshall Islands, made by two women in the delegation. The pin was then attached on the new member's lapel. As such, it became a highly visible statement of being part of the Coalition, and as the delegates walked arm in arm into the final plenary meeting, they were all wearing their pins to show their membership.

Nonetheless, it was Selina, who tied it all together as she said:

The coconut leaf I wear on my hair and I hold up in my hand is from the Marshall Islands. I wear them today in hope of keeping them for my children and my grandchildren – these simple strands of coconut leaf. There are many leaders around this room who share with me – with us – this hope for saving our world, and are wearing a little piece of the Marshall Islands today.

This statement eloquently creates an instant link between the many leaders who at that point all were proudly wearing the pin, to the future generations of the Marshall Islands. The coconut tree itself is in the Pacific Islands considered to be the tree of life, and bears a strong symbolic meaning. This symbolism did not escape the members, and the pin was even called “the ambitious tree of life” by the Minister of Canada.

Further, the giving of a gift, according to Mauss (2002[1954]), comes with a sense of obligation of both receiving and giving in return. “In this system of ideas one clearly and logically realizes that one must give back to another person what is really part and parcel of his nature and substance, because to accept something from somebody is to accept some part of his spiritual essence, of his soul”, Mauss poetically wrote in 1925 (2002[1954]:16). As new Coalition members walked to the Marshall Islands delegation office to shake hands with the head of the delegation, they too came with a gift of sorts. I suggest what members perhaps were giving back was something that “is really part and parcel of his nature and substance”, in the form of the continued life on islands. By this I draw the link to the tree of life from the Marshall Islands as given to the Coalition members, in that it committed them to “pursuing efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5 degrees Celsius” (Paris Agreement, Article 2, paragraph

1(a)). For the small islands states, including the 1.5° C ambition really is a matter of what they are able to *live* with, of which the tree of life serves as a reminder.

Informal kava sessions

The gift is then creating a relation between the people doing the exchange, thereby establishing a moral bond and social obligation. This is also an important aspect of the kava ceremony, which seeks to create new relations with strangers as well as strengthen the existing ones. In the days ahead of the final plenary, deBrum invited potential members of the Coalition to a kava session at the Marshallese pavilion, thereby providing an informal opportunity to *talk story* in a relaxed atmosphere. It is also worth noting that drinking kava is not that common in Marshall Islands, yet deBrum was particularly fond of it and thus included it into his own diplomatic repertoire. Kava sessions furthermore provided a setting where Pacific delegates were in control and set the protocol of interaction, rather than following the expected UN protocol. “It is in this small meeting room that the important decisions are made”, Schia claims with regard to the UN Security Council (2013:148). I would like to rephrase that in a manner that falls true to many Pacific Islands, by saying that *it is around the kava bowl that important decisions are made*.



Photo 12: Drinking kava at the Talanoa Dialogue. (@CollinBeck 2018)

The COP negotiations were no exception, a point that by the time of COP23 had become very clear, as a kava ceremony officially opened the conference. During COP23, kava was served at the Fiji pavilion regularly to everyone, including the VIPs who visited the pavilion. Finally, kava has now also become a part of the 2018 Talanoa Dialogue meetings where participants can drink some during the breaks, as shown in the tweet in Photo 9 by Solomon Islands High Commissioner to Australia (and key COP negotiator) Collin Beck.

Formalising the informal

The development of the role of kava drinking during COPs serves as a good example for the following discussion nearing the end of the chapter. From COP21 to COP23 there was a noteworthy change that reflects the strategy of ‘culturalisation’ in Pacific climate diplomacy. What was considered informal at COP21 became increasingly more formalised two years later at COP23 during the Fiji Presidency. At COP23 in 2017, a Fijian kava ceremony opened the first official plenary meeting of the conference, several meetings and events were accompanied by Pacific dancers and singers, the Fiji-initiated Ocean Pathway was launched, and the *drua* double-hull canoe took centre stage at both the Bonn Zone and the Bula Zone.

The Ocean Pathway aims to highlight the critical role of the ocean for the world’s climate, and to establish healthy oceans as a UNFCCC agenda item (Ocean Pathway 2017). It is also a way to make sure that oceans are included into countries’ National Determined Contributions (NDCs) and to increase financial support for projects concerned with the marine environment. In explaining the importance of the ocean for Pacific Islanders, the Ocean Pathway website also makes the point that Fiji “recognizes the significance of *their role as Large Ocean States*” (COP23 2018b); today a frequently invoked alternative designation of Pacific countries, rhetorically countering the Small Island Developing States (SIDS) category of the UN. The Ocean Pathway presents a formalised strategy for 2020 to make sure that ocean related issues are followed up.

Last, but not least, the *talanoa* was introduced in two different ways. There was a *Talanoa Space* in the Bonn Zone where government officials, observers, UN staff and everyone else were invited to open dialogue. It was a place for discussions,

performances, and sharing of stories. More importantly however, the *Talanoa Dialogue* was introduced in 2017 as a formal approach of a mandated process of facilitative dialogue as stated in the Paris Agreement. In that way, Pacific delegations have achieved a formalising of the informal under the Fiji Presidency at COP23. Ironically, this reflects how something that is initially considered informal in a global COP context, may simultaneously be considered formal in a Pacific or Fijian context. It reflects a systematic and strategic Pacific ‘culturalisation’ of climate negotiations, and in a sense it is ‘re-formalising’ a Pacific concept into novel settings.

The Talanoa Dialogue

According to the Paris Agreement, progress assessments or “stocktakes” are called for every five years. These assessments are important because they will provide information about the climate commitments and progress of all countries, and thus establish what action is needed in order to reduce temperature rise as much as possible. As already touched on in Chapter 3, the Talanoa Dialogue was launched during COP23 as an initial stocktaking exercise for both Parties and non-Party stakeholders. On the Talanoa Dialogue website the Talanoa is described in the following way (United Nations Climate Change 2018):

Talanoa is a traditional word used in Fiji and across the Pacific to reflect a process of inclusive, participatory and transparent dialogue. The purpose of Talanoa is to share stories, build empathy and to make wise decisions for the collective good. The process of Talanoa involves the sharing of ideas, skills and experience through storytelling.

The most important aspect of the Talanoa is “building mutual trust and respect”, achieved through the act of storytelling, not negotiating. The first round of the Talanoa Dialogue was held during the May 2018 intersessional meeting in Bonn, which is the meeting in between the COPs (which are normally in November or December). In the informal note provided by the Presidencies of COP22 and COP23, it was clearly stated that “the dialogue will be *conducted in the spirit of the Pacific tradition of Talanoa*” (my emphasis, UNFCCC 2017). Although there was a limit on the number of participants allowed to attend the Talanoa Dialogue in person, participation was open for all, not just negotiators or government officials. The meetings were broadcasted live so that people were able to follow the discussions from around the world, as well as participate through the online platform.

There were in total seven parallel Talanoa groups, and each one of them had names after an area in Fiji affected by climate change.⁷⁴ Participants were also welcomed to wear their traditional clothing. The participants gathered to discuss three main questions: Where are we? Where do we want to go? How do we get there? The participants were then encouraged to all share their stories and experiences in order to answer these questions. The format of the Talanoa was as such very different from normally procedure during UNFCCC meetings. The following day after the Talanoa was held during the May 2018 intersessional meeting in Bonn, a news article in Climate Home News even had the headline “Sunday talanoa: climate negotiators ‘talk to each other like people’” (Darby 2018). The article explained how the Talanoa format helped break down language barriers between negotiators and other participants, breaking away from technical language and protocol interaction.



Photo 13: One of seven parallel Talanoa sessions during the intersessional meetings in Bonn, May 2018. The participants are seated in a circle. A Facilitator makes sure everyone gets a chance to speak. In the middle of the circle is a traditional Fijian mat (ibe) decorated with kava bowls (tanoo) and Fijian objects. (Photo: IISD/ENB | Kiara Worth)⁷⁵

The Talanoa Dialogue is replacing *interventions* with *stories* as a formal procedure of communication, and makes it possible for participants to share their opinions directly with each other and not through country groupings or similar. The

⁷⁴ On the official Talanoa Dialogue website the seven Talanoa Group names are listed, all referring to Fijian districts affected by climate change (Kadavu, Lakeba, Ba, Tailevu, Rakiraki, Koro, and Bua). Under each of the names, there is a small description of how climate change is experienced in these places. These include issues such as food security, education, economic loss, sea level rise, extreme weather, changing climate, and history, culture and ancestry.

⁷⁵ <http://www.climatechangenews.com/2018/05/07/sunday-talanoa-climate-negotiators-talk-like-people/>

emphasis on stories is further reflected on the Talanoa Dialogue website, where ‘stories’ have officially been included in the list of available documents from the opening meetings under the listing “Statements and Stories”.⁷⁶

During the Talanoa Dialogue discussions at the May 2018 intersessional meeting, President of Marshall Islands Hilda Heine (@President_Heine 2018) published a tweet that underlined the desire to move away from bureaucratic and protocol heavy procedures in climate discussions: “The #Talanoa4ambition is not some bureaucratic box-ticking exercise for my country. It’s the first step for giving us the pathway to survival the #ParisAgreement promised us”. In this, President Heine summarises the Pacific approach quite well, by pointing out that it is far from ‘a box ticking exercise’, referring to the dominating bureaucratised way of dealing with climate change issues so far.

The COP23 Presidency successfully managed to formalise and embed several elements of Pacific traditions and sociality, consistently and consciously undermining what I described in Chapter 3 as existing ‘standardised social forms’ of meeting protocols. In the final part of this chapter, I turn to the Climate Leaders themselves in order to finish where it started, so to speak: Facing climate change, and telling it through a conversion of levels and scales.

Climate Leaders: Conversion of scales and levels

In his opening statement at COP21 in Paris 30 November 2015, the President of the Marshall Islands, Christopher J. Loeak, started his speech like this:

Mr. Secretary-General, Mr. President, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, I address you today not only as a President, but as a father, as a grandfather, as a custodian of my culture, and as a representative of a nation that lies just two meters above sea level and risks being submerged by the rising waves. Everything I know, and everyone I love, is in the hands of all of us gathered here today.

His speech clearly exemplifies how Loeak represents a multitude of Marshallese levels and scales. The different roles and responsibilities that Loeak mentions, shows the Pacific person in action, in congruence with Strathern’s understanding of the dividual as discussed in Chapter 4. According to Strathern (1988:13), persons are “constructed

⁷⁶ See <https://talanoadialogue.com/key-documents>

as the plural” and a result of “the relationships that produce them”. This leads to a form of multi-scalar “compressed globalisation” (Hviding 2003) because of a ‘closeness’ and ‘density’ in Pacific decision-making. The political process is therefore a highly socially inclusive process as ‘one may include many’, in the sense that one person may wear many hats, as well as being part of an extensive kinship system with strong cultural ties.

As such, it is the density of these scales that allow particular stories to travel as they are brought forward through people like Loek. Now, I have already suggested in Chapter 4 that this may explain why a small country like Palau has managed, through the Marine Sanctuary, to have what should be considered as an inverted proportional international presence in large-scale decision-making, setting an example for other countries of the world. On a more individual level, Pacific diplomats play an important role in that they are not only the “symbolic and physical embodiment” (Altman & Shore, 2014:430) of their countries, but they are also bearers of Pacific place-based and localised knowledge and understanding of climate change.

The process of making climate change negotiations increasingly more ‘Pacific’ provides Pacific delegations with growing opportunities to shape the larger global narrative about climate change. A COP thus provides Pacific countries with a space to influence people from across the world; a global stage, so to speak. Little (1995:281) has argued that such conferences, using the 1992 Rio Conference as example, gives a sense that the global becomes local: “In Rio, the global became local, and hence ‘approachable’ in traditional ethnographic terms”. It may be that conferences such as COPs provides a sense of materialisation of ‘the global’, as representatives from across the entire world attend and discuss issues that are ‘global’ in their nature. However, climate change is, to repeat previous points made, an entanglement of global-local levels and relations. Even though a COP is a transnational event, it is not free of different country-specific cultural dimensions. Rather, that is exactly what it is about; it is about pushing country-specific political positions. Furthermore, the conference is a space where country delegates attend to represent their states and opinions, and perhaps that is rather what makes it ‘approachable’.

Through a Pacific climate diplomacy strategy as examined and analysed here, Pacific delegates are ‘culturalising’ and ‘making place relevant’ for COP negotiations. They are actively moving between scales: Pacific delegates are speaking on behalf of, for example, Palau or Tuvalu, speaking on behalf of a region, a group, and then ultimately on behalf of the world, as seen in several of the speeches and statements.

Thomas Hylland Eriksen (2018:3) provides an analysis of movement between scales of environmental engagement, and states that scale may refer to “the scope and compass of a phenomenon - whether it is small or big, short-term or long-term and local or global”. Pacific delegates are continuously, I argue, navigating between different scales and within them, as they are making the “Pacific local” relevant in the global and vice versa. They are shifting scales, or “upscaling” (Eriksen, 2016:132) as a means of enlarging ‘the local’ to ‘the global’. The stories of Pacific climate change experiences, particularly at side events and the Talanoa Dialogue, could be seen as developing such an approach. Similarly, the *drua* as a symbol for the Pacific voyage and the Ocean Pathway as a connection between all countries of the world, are equally important. The Pacific representatives at COPs are creating their own vernacular diplomacy models of ‘localising’ climate change through drawing on relational methods and narrative techniques of storytelling most familiar to them.

Pacific delegates are thus moving between scales, using stories to localise climate change. They are in that sense *Waa*, as envisioned by Joakim Peter: “*Waa* is blood vessels, *Waa* is canoe, *Waa* is people. ... We are the vessels that carry forth the strength or the mana for our place”. Through ‘culturalising’ and sharing Pacific climate change stories, delegates are indeed *Waa*. Yet, it must be noted that climate change stories are often situational. To be successful, stories depend on the audience's expectations and needs, as well as the storyteller's motivation and setting. Such expectations may very well be associated with the fact that Pacific Islanders, including Pacific delegates, carry ‘truths’ about climate since they have experienced it. But, they can also fit into expectations of a stereotypical imagery of the Pacific with palm trees and blue ocean, or in accordance with the narrative of being passive victims on sinking tropical islands. There is therefore certainly the danger that Pacific Islanders are subject to being ‘exotified’ or ‘othered’ (see Said 1978).

This is, however, something that Pacific Islanders have continuously tried to challenge. They have done so, first and foremost, by trying to enhance understanding for the complicated and complex Pacific climate change situation by contextualising through stories. However, as a story must do more than just explain the situation, it must engage in such a way that the listeners are incorporated into the story and thus establish a sense of feeling like they have themselves a part to play in the story. Ultimately, it is therefore about creating a relation and shaping a relation based on a common understanding that ‘we are all in the same canoe’. This is shown through the last sentence of Selina speech at the final day of COP21, in that the Paris agreement “should be the turning point in *our* story; a turning point for *all of us*” (my emphasis) thereby not only making it a Pacific story, but a global one.

Pacific agency has previously been envisioned by Epeli Hau’ofa (1994) as involving islands and islanders connected by the vast ocean, creating a ‘new Oceania’ as a basis for a Pacific identity and progress. Showing agency through being climate leaders however goes far beyond the region itself. Climate change has, it may seem, encouraged Pacific peoples to influence the world at large by drawing on multi-scalar and multi-level models (such as the Peter’s idea of *Waa*) to take on a position as climate leaders. If climate change can take on a personified dimension, I would argue that Pacific delegates at COP meetings have achieved this. The Pacific person at climate change negotiations ‘is’ climate change in many ways, as the entanglements between place, people and story become increasingly clear for non-Pacific delegates as well. As such, ‘having a lot of climate change’ as related to ideas around ‘climate change-ness’, is extended to the Pacific delegate at negotiations.

I believe it is appropriate now to give space for some final and summarising words about how Pacific countries are taking a clear leadership role at climate negotiations, as stated by Palau’s President Remengesau (2017) in his impactful High Level Statement at COP23:

Mr. Prime Minister,

Palau is under no illusions about the impact one small island nation can have on the planet. But we have nonetheless chosen to lead by example. Our small size - often a

disadvantage in the global economy - makes us nimble enough to embrace new solutions. Modest resources can have a transformational impact. Indeed, small islands can be the incubators of new ideas and new approaches.

Big ideas can come from small places. Palau is doing all it can to demonstrate that our internationally agreed goals do in fact mean something, and are the guiding star as we navigate toward a sustainable future. We are ready to show the world that a better future is possible. My friends, it is time to start listening to vulnerable countries.

Epilogue

As I am writing this epilogue, COP24 in Poland has just come to an end, and an extensive set of guidelines, a “rulebook” for the implementation of the Paris Agreement, has been adopted. This time around, I have had to follow the negotiations from afar. Nevertheless, I diligently followed and read the news and relevant updates on social media during COP24. Building on my fieldwork experiences from COP21-23, this strategy provided me with instructive glimpses and deeper interpretations from the ongoing discussions and negotiations in Katowice. I imagined in my mind the possible scenarios and discussions within the negotiation rooms when hearing about certain countries discussing specific words in the text. I could almost feel the exhaustion myself when reading about the many hours of meeting overtime that must have left negotiators extremely tired. For me, these are no longer distant political discussions that take place in some faraway place. Having experienced and participated in several COPs, I can visualise, imagine and understand the complexities, the difficulties, and the frustration, but also the joy.

In a similar fashion, I can now understand that it is not as simple as “just moving” or building another floor on a house when the ocean is gushing through the front door of your home – as is increasingly the case in Pacific countries. Yet, there are many people who still do not understand this predicament of today. Only a few days ago, a Norwegian right-wing politician publicly argued that problems in island countries are self-inflicted and the result of a local “lack” of adaptability (Rydje 2018). Such ignorant statements do not only reflect little understanding of and insight in how and why climate change affects people differently around the world; they may also harm the ongoing work by Pacific Islanders themselves of sharing experiences of climate change across the world.

Establishing a sense of shared understanding is therefore increasingly more important as climate change impacts in small island countries grow in intensity and frequency. As shown throughout the preceding chapters, this requires continuous work across levels and scales. Yet, when public figures, such as the Norwegian right-wing

politician, express scepticism of climate change impacts and show little understanding of local situations, there obviously is still much more work to be done. Not being believed or heard remains a challenge for Pacific Islanders. This became as clear as ever on that day in November 2016 Donald Trump was elected President of the United States.

The presidential election results were announced at the same time as delegations from the entire world had gathered in Marrakech, Morocco, for COP22. The sense of disbelief about the election results among many of the delegates at the climate conference was palpable and visible through continuous discussion, as was the sense of despair. Trump, an avowed climate change sceptic, suddenly, through his victory, questioned the work that had been done in previous years during climate negotiations, and jeopardised the future of the Paris Agreement. As the Small Island Developing States of the world gathered at COP22 for their daily meeting on the day of the US presidential election, the existential fear came to show as island delegates asked themselves “What will this mean for us?”, and “Will we survive?”.

This happened only a year after that same global group of delegates had gathered after the COP21 plenary session to celebrate the success of the adoption of the Paris Agreement. Then, delegates had been cheering with drinks and chanting the catchphrase: “One point five, to stay alive!”. Fast-forward to present day, with Trump as president of the world’s second largest contributor of greenhouse gas emissions and working to withdraw from the Paris Agreement, and the prospect of limiting future temperature increase to 1.5°C is indeed shaken.

But Trump is not the only threat to achieving progress in this area: just recently, during COP24, an alliance of major oil-producing countries consisting of USA, Russia, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait refused to include the word “welcome” in the negotiation text about the special report commissioned by IPCC (2018) on the scientific analysis of 1.5°C warming. Instead, the four states wanted to use the word “note”, thus merely noting the report, not welcoming it. The difference between these two words lies on the level of recognition of the scientific findings of the report, which states that global warming beyond 1.5°C will have dire consequences, thus pressing the need for immediate global climate action. Yet, such action would imply reducing the oil

production that is such a source of great wealth not least for the USA, Russia, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. The consequences of prioritising such national interests of a handful of countries, thereby undermining global consensus, are likely to have serious impact on Pacific countries.

Through the chapters of this study I have sought to show how Pacific island countries face both challenges and opportunities in living with the consequences of a changing global climate, and I have argued for an ethnographic approach to the study of climate change that reaches across a multiplicity of levels and scales. Such an approach is needed to grasp the dimensions of complexities that Pacific Islanders face. These span from ‘the sea level’ to UN negotiation rooms, in ways simultaneously connected and disconnected. I have therefore argued that for my Pacific interlocutors, climate change encompasses a wide array of experiences and understandings ranging from everyday struggles with sea level rise and flooding, to writing a national climate change policy, to negotiating with the world at the UN. In order to analyse these disparate and multifaceted experiences I have explored some historical and socio-political contexts that shape the way climate change is talked about and dealt with in the Pacific, with a special ethnographic emphasis on Palau, owing not least to that country’s self-declared status as somewhat of a ‘world leader’ on taking climate action.

Palau and other Pacific countries have managed to build what may be considered an inverted proportional international presence through large-scale national and regional decision-making and position-making, setting an example for other countries of the world and thereby “leading by example”. In a similar manner, Pacific countries have had an inverted proportional international presence on a global stage on issues concerning climate change. This is also the result of the growth of a more regionally unified voice from Pacific countries and the widely shared Pacific aim to be ‘Climate Leaders’. As expressed in the beginning of Selina Leem’s COP21 speech, such Pacific approaches emphasise the importance of working hard to change the order of things, turning things ‘upside down’ from what they have been: Indeed, the countries considered most vulnerable are now the countries with the greatest ambitions, poised to set examples where leadership in other countries and regions is failing.

In terms of theoretical and methodological contributions, this study has demonstrated the applicability of an approach that conceptually and methodologically expands on Pacific notions of stories and storytelling. These narrative styles and rhetorical genres serve as important tools for creating the specific relation that is required to assist others in understanding what climate change means for Pacific islanders. As discussed and demonstrated, there are long traditions of storytelling in Pacific societies, and stories tend to be seen as belonging to particular people and places. The sharing of a story should therefore not be underestimated in terms of its potential as a powerful tool to connect climate change to a place and a people, particularly when experiences are told in a personal, emotional and visually expressive way. Small stories can in this respect be as large as global discourses: “a story about our islands” Selina argues, is “a story for the whole world”. What I have called Pacific climate change stories are thus key elements in a process of knowledge-sharing that invokes a conceptualisation and contextualisation of what climate change looks like and who is living with it, working towards establishing a connection between the international and global level and ‘the sea level’.

Throughout the chapters of this study I have sought to discern processes of cross-regional and international position-making and knowledge-sharing. A central concern is that the dominating way of sharing climate change experiences and information about Pacific Islanders’ empirically distinctive social realities in documents and meetings, goes through a particular process of transformation before reaching non-Pacific audiences. I have therefore discussed the more or less limiting ways of how local climate change stories may reach out (or not), through processes of transformation into language and structural forms that adhere certain reporting criteria and document aesthetics geared to donors’ requirements of “knowledge management”. The result of this complex process is that an ambition for knowledge-sharing ironically sets in motion an abatement of information, due to the use of standards for making social realities ‘manageable’. Another concern is that the representation of Pacific Islanders in broader public discourse has been dominated by a narrative that furthers a view of them as powerless victims of the local impacts of global climate change. It is

therefore becoming increasingly more important for Pacific Islanders to counter such marginalising framings and influence public discourse accordingly.

A correlating process of “knowledge management” is found in UN climate negotiations, where particularities of place and people have historically been left out in order to follow rigid rules of protocol that set the tone of language between country negotiators and shapes the social forms of meetings. When distinctive social realities are downplayed in meetings or made ‘manageable’ in documents, place-based knowledges, perceptions and experiences of climate change are left out. This in particular concerns cultural and social impacts that often cannot be seen or measured, and which are therefore all the more difficult to define and standardise.

The core of my argument is that through the development of a globally distinctive Pacific climate diplomacy, a conversion of Pacific climate change stories takes place and extends into the realm of global climate governance. The stories of climate change as expressed in different forms by Pacific delegates, carry the authority of lived experiences of climate change in its multifaceted ways and represent as such its own authenticity in a COP setting. That is why I argue that Pacific delegations at COP meetings have developed a strategy to create space at COPs to voice their concerns and incorporate formal mechanisms that make place relevant and that values Pacific-based approaches of knowledge-sharing. This is part of a Pacific climate diplomacy that draws on forms of ‘culturalisation’, exemplified most prominently through the formalisation of the Talanoa Dialogue. The Pacific diplomats and representatives here play important roles, as they travel and move with embedded experiences of living with climate change, founded on the propinquity between place and the Pacific person. They are in a sense bearers of Pacific place-based and localised knowledge and understandings of climate change.

This study has contributed to contemporary scholarly debates on of climate change within anthropology and responds to broader methodological needs for in-depth empirical research. By taking an approach of ‘studying through’, my focus has been on decision makers, institutions and bureaucracy, as well as ‘on the ground’ events, situations and contexts in Palau, Solomon Islands, and elsewhere, and the emergence of the Pacific region as a particular social, cultural and political part of the world.

Through this method, the strong entanglements in Pacific island countries between ‘grassroots’ and ‘elites’, as well as between politics and kinship, have emerged, reflecting a density of global-local connections.

I have further argued for a renewed notion of locality that postulates such global entanglement and multi-scalarness. Ideas of ‘the local’ can in that sense take on new meanings and purposes as they ‘travel’, through stories and people. The relationship between people and place becomes increasingly more important because of the ‘global imaginary’ of climate change’s with highly unequal local implications. Therefore, for anthropologists, it is not just about studying the different (or ‘local’) ways of understanding and of being influenced by climate change, it is also about how these perceptions ‘work’ globally. In order to illustrate this, I have applied a multi-sited approach in combination with single-site analysis. Through applying a method that allowed my fieldwork to expand over time, by actively following interlocutors and discourses, I have provided insights on how climate change knowledges travel, are transformed, and are created.

This has revealed certain complexities of multi-scalar and multi-level conversions that would be fruitful for future research. I am thinking here in particular about how Pacific delegates have struggled with how they could “bring something back home” from the global climate negotiations. The reason for experiencing this kind of struggle was, for some Pacific delegates, based on unclear outcomes of negotiations, and uncertainty as to what direct impacts the outcomes might carry for people whose everyday lives are in the Pacific Islands. The “delegates’ struggle” reflects multi-scalar and multi-level complexities, where a conversion from one scale or level to another may be difficult – even though they may be strongly entangled and intertwined. Sometimes this entanglement can be positive, such as in Pacific climate diplomacy where ‘the local’ may be enlarged to ‘the global’ through a process of “upscaling” (Eriksen, 2016b:132). But sometimes “clashes” may occur, as shown through the example of the Palau Marine Sanctuary. Enlarging or converting a vernacular term, such as *bul*, was highly successful when converted from a national context to a global context like the UN. International attention was however difficult to convert back to a national or local context in a similar meaningful way.

Facing climate change now and in the future, Pacific Islanders will have to deal with many such entanglements. What this study has illustrated, is that Pacific Islanders have shown leadership, dedication, and adaptability – not only in terms of the diverse physical impacts of climate change, but also with regard to the changing geostrategic, political and epistemological environments that they are subjected to. They are establishing renewed geopolitical structures, and have in recent years achieved a noteworthy presence in international fora. It still remains to see the full extent of the recent Fiji-led COP23, and to document further the impact it has had on building Pacific countries as global Climate Leaders. Will we see more inclusion of small island states from now on? Will stories continue to grow into a formal approach of cross-regional and multi-scalar knowledge-sharing? These questions are at the core of prospective research opportunities, and they also define imminent future challenges for those who already live on, and act on, the climate change frontline.

Appendices

APPENDIX A: TABLE OF PACIFIC ISLAND COUNTRIES AND TERRITORIES

| Country or Territory | Population ⁷⁷ | Political status | Colonial connections | UN member state | Party to UNFCCC |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------|------------------|--------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| MICRONESIA | | | | | |
| Palau | 17 661 | Free Association | United States of America | Yes | Yes |
| Northern Mariana Islands | 53 883 | Territory | United States of America | No | No |
| Federated States of Micronesia | 102 843 | Free Association | United States of America | Yes | Yes |
| Guam | 159 358 | Territory | United States of America | No | No |
| Kiribati | 110 136 | Independent | United Kingdom | Yes | Yes |
| Marshall Islands | 53 158 | Free Association | United States of America | Yes | Yes |
| Nauru | 10 084 | Independent | United Kingdom | Yes | Yes |
| MELANESIA | | | | | |
| Fiji | 837 271 | Independent | United Kingdom | Yes | Yes |
| Papua New Guinea | 7 275 324 | Independent | Australia | Yes | Yes |
| New Caledonia | 268 767 | Territory | France | No | No |
| Vanuatu | 234 023 | Independent | France/United Kingdom | Yes | Yes |
| Solomon Islands | 515 870 | Independent | United Kingdom | Yes | Yes |
| POLYNESIA | | | | | |
| American Samoa | 55 519 | Territory | United States of America | No | No |
| Samoa | 187 820 | Independent | New Zealand | Yes | Yes |
| Cook Islands | 14 974 | Free Association | New Zealand | No | Yes |
| French Polynesia | 268 270 | Territory | France | No | No |
| Niue | 1 611 | Free Association | New Zealand | No | Yes |
| Tokelau | 1 411 | Territory | New Zealand | No | No |
| Tonga | 100 651 | Independent | United Kingdom | Yes | Yes |
| Tuvalu | 10 782 | Independent | United Kingdom | Yes | Yes |
| Wallis and Futuna | 12 197 | Territory | France | No | No |
| Total | 10 291 613 | | | | |

⁷⁷ Source of population data: SPC (2017).

APPENDIX B: AAA STATEMENT ON HUMANITY AND CLIMATE CHANGE



AMERICAN ANTHROPOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION

AAA Statement on Humanity and Climate Change

Climate change creates global threats that affect all aspects of human life, including our health, homes, livelihoods, and cultures, as well as our physical environment. Threats of this magnitude affect our stability—our sense of cultural identity, our well-being, and our security. As the discipline most clearly devoted to the human condition over time and space, anthropology offers important insights that can help create workable solutions to mitigate the impacts of climate change.

We put forth the following eight points for understanding the impacts of climate change from an anthropological perspective:

1. Climate change is a **present reality** that alters our physical environment and impacts human cultures around the globe. Climate change is not a crisis of the distant future or a myth. It affects us now, at home and abroad.
2. Climate change **intensifies underlying problems**—poverty and economic disparities, food and water security, and armed conflict—heightening these issues to the point of widespread crisis. Anthropologists predict climate change will accelerate migration, destabilize communities and nations, and exacerbate the spread of infectious diseases.
3. We can expect to see **widespread impacts on communities** as they face dislocation and pressure to migrate. Climate change will challenge peoples' cultures and beliefs as their sense of safety and daily habits are undermined by an increasingly unpredictable relationship with their environment. People in both developed and developing countries will feel the pressures. Those who have directly depended on natural resources for centuries—in high latitude/altitude areas, low-lying island nations, coastal environments, and other biomes—will have their lives most disrupted.
4. While climate change affects all of Earth's inhabitants, **the impacts will fall unevenly** and with particular weight on those already affected by existing vulnerabilities, including children, the elderly, those who live with handicaps and restrictive health conditions, and those who do not have sufficient means to move or change their lives. The most vulnerable will be uprooted or forced to move. As climate impacts intensify, public expenditures needed for emergency aid and restoration will escalate.
5. Specific human actions and choices drive climate change by emphasizing fossil fuel as the primary energy source, creating a **culture of consumerism**, and favoring land use practices that undermine ecological resilience. Anthropologists recognize that humanity's actions and cultures are now the most important causes of the dramatic environmental changes seen in the last 100 years. We consider this period the Anthropocene.
6. The archaeological record reveals diverse human adaptations and innovations to climate stresses occurring over millennia, providing evidence that is **relevant to contemporary human experience**. The archaeological record shows that diversity and flexibility increase resilience to stress in complex adaptive systems, and that successful adaptations incorporate principles of sustainability.
7. Climate change is a global problem with local and regional impacts that **require local and regional solutions**. Successful adaptation to climate change varies by locale even within regions experiencing similar environmental pressures. Thus, it is important for there to be community involvement in crafting, determining, and adopting measures for adaptation, not solely global and national governance and plans.
8. Focusing solely on reducing carbon emissions will not be sufficient to address climate change—that approach will not address the systemic causes. Climate change is rooted in social institutions and cultural habits. **Real solutions will require knowledge and insight from the social sciences** and humanities, not only from the natural sciences. Climate change is not a natural problem, it is a human problem. 🌍

American Anthropological Association 1/29/2015

Figure 10: Facsimile of AAA Statement on Humanity and Climate Change (2015).

APPENDIX C: SECTOR ADAPTIVE CAPACITY ASSESSMENT

Sector Adaptive Capacity Assessments

| Identify Sector | Yes or No | Comments or explanation |
|---|-----------|-------------------------|
| Is sector currently vulnerable to risks from climate change or will be at risk within next 5 years? | | |
| Is there knowledge, information and awareness within sector about the risks from climate change that confront the sector? | | |
| Is there knowledge, information and awareness within sector about the mechanisms/strategies to manage risks from climate change? | | |
| Are there supportive sector policy/strategy/programs to address risks from climate change affecting the sector? | | |
| Are there management/institutional mechanisms/tools (at site specific level if applicable) to manage risks from climate change affecting the sector? | | |
| Are there resources (human, technical, financial) or social capital available/committed to manage risks from climate change affecting the sector or will be made available within next 5 years? | | |



Figure 11: Facsimile of Sector Adaptive Capacity Assessment (Government of Palau 2015)

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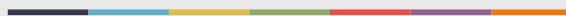
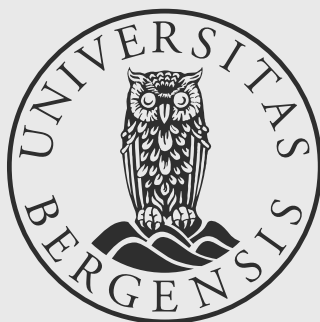
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