

Their Sea of Islands? Pacific Climate Warriors, Oceanic identities and World Enlargement

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Abstract

Climate change, in terms of its current and future impacts, is a critical issue for the Pacific Islands. However, many journalistic and academic accounts reiterate a narrative that represents Pacific Islanders as hopeless and helpless victims of climate change and their homelands as already lost to rising seas. This reinforces the preexisting marginalization of the Pacific Islands region that has been both highlighted and challenged by Epeli Hau'ofa's "sea of islands" vision. However, analyzing the actions of the pan-Pacific activist network the Pacific Climate Warriors through the lens of Hau'ofa's work suggests alternative narratives to the drowning islands discourse. This article draws on ethnographic research conducted with the Pacific Climate Warriors, who converged in Australia in October 2014 to take action against climate change, assembling a flotilla of canoes and kayaks in Newcastle Harbor to halt coal barges. Using song, dance, and direct action, the Warriors embodied forms of Oceanic regionalism, expressing fluid and composite pan-Pacific identities and enacting forms of world enlargement, thereby resonating with Hau'ofa's vision. Their manifestation of regionalism was predicated on difference rather than homogeneity in terms of their "relative altitudinal privilege," complicating representations of the Warriors as equally on the front lines of climate change. Through their actions and their claims that they are "not drowning but fighting," the Pacific Climate Warriors worked to counter the belittlement of the Pacific Islands region and present a vision of Oceanic power.

Keywords: climate change, Hau'ofa, regionalism, performance, identity, activism

On 17 October 2014, thirty Pacific Islanders who had traveled from twelve different nations, accompanied by a few hundred Australian activistsⁱ, shut down the passage of coal barges for eight hours at Newcastle Harbor, New South Wales, Australia, the world's largest coal export port. Using a flotilla of handmade canoes and kayaks, the self-styled "Pacific Climate Warriors" physically blockaded the movements of ships, thereby highlighting the links between the Australian coal industry and climate change impacts in their home islands. The flotilla was the centerpiece of a month-long campaign tour across Australia—encompassing speaking events, training workshops, solidarity visits to sites of ecological struggle and other direct actionsⁱⁱ—and was buoyed by the rallying cry "We are not drowning, we are fighting". Drawing on ethnographic research conducted with the Pacific Climate Warriors, in this article I examine the events of the flotilla and situate the question of what it means to be "not drowning but fighting" in relation to dominant

discursive constructions of the Pacific Islands and climate change: namely narratives of drowning islands and helpless Islanders. I place these acts of defiance in dialogue with Epeli Hau'ofa's "sea of islands" vision (1994), arguing that the Pacific Climate Warriors, like Hau'ofa, also worked to challenge the marginalization of the Pacific and embody the power and potential of Oceania.

From Drowning Islands to "*Our Sea of Islands*"

As Mike Hulme highlighted, "part of the familiar visual vocabulary of changing climates and rising sea-level is the Pacific island atoll and the stranded helpless island victim forced to migrate and in need of 'saving' by an enlightened world" (2016, 101). This vocabulary is evident in news articles (Farbotko 2005), popular scientific accounts (Kempf 2015) and cinematic portrayals (Chambers and Chambers 2007) that represent Pacific Island nations, and particularly atoll states, as already doomed due to climate change and that characterize their inhabitants as passive prospective climate refugees. These representations can echo and reinforce former colonial representations of Pacific Islands as "sites of backwardness, insularity, constraint, fragility and weakness" (Barnett and Campbell 2010, 2) and they can even discursively encourage the performance and production of further vulnerability, thereby "foreclosing alternative and empowering political identities" (Webber 2013, 2720). This "drowning islands" discourse can "inhibit rather than encourage action on climate change, disempower communities and unintentionally exacerbate existing ecological and socio-economic problems" (Fair 2019, 178). There is a need to explore alternative framings for this discourse, and that Hau'ofa's work is a vital tool for doing so.

In "Our Sea of Islands" (1994), Hau'ofa's thesis is that there is an ongoing marginalization and belittlement of the Pacific, predicated on an understanding of the Pacific as made up of small, fragmented, isolated islands. Yet he argued that this fragmentation is the product of the imposition of colonial boundaries and that it neglects the history of material, cultural and political interconnection—of movement and epic voyages that historically characterized the region. He reasoned that the Pacific Island nations are "not necessarily small or helpless" or dependent on the whims of larger states (Hau'ofa 1993, 128). Instead, the region must grasp its power as an interconnected and unified "sea of islands", as opposed to as vulnerable, isolated and irrelevant "islands in a far sea" (1994, 152). This "sea of islands" vision provides both a rebuttal to the vision of victimhood suffusing the drowning islands discourse and a theoretical bulwark to the Pacific Climate Warriors' expressions of agency and "fighting".

Two aspects of Hau'ofa's work are particularly pertinent to the Pacific Climate Warriors: the relationship between Pan-Pacific identity, diversity and difference and the concept of Oceanic power through "world enlargement". First, Hau'ofa advocated for forms of connection and regional identity that transcend and "[blur] the boundaries of nation-states" (Jolly 2007, 530). However, his vision of Oceania has been accused of being predicated on "a homogenous Pacific Society" (Ratuva 1993, 95-96), thereby belying the

region's cultural and linguistic diversity. This is a critical concern, given that the homogenization or creation of a mythical and essentialized representation of the Pacific has been a crucial component of its belittlement (Fry 1997). Scholars have raised concerns that Hau'ofa wishfully overlooked existing tensions, hierarchies and rivalries in the Pacific, which have the potential to undermine continental unity (Naidu 1993), in particular the belittlement of Melanesians by Polynesians (Kabutaulaka 2015, 113). Hau'ofa's work is seen by some as complicit in this, as the universality of his Pacific vision is questionable, due to the lesser involvement of Melanesia and Micronesia in the region's international kin-based connections (Thaman 1993, 43), and the focus on a seafaring tradition that largely excludes Melanesia (Griffen 1993)ⁱⁱⁱ. Yet Hau'ofa's work has also been defended as drawing interconnections premised upon diversity, the inhabiting of multiple identities, and an effort to find points of commonality while still holding onto distinct Island heritages (Jolly 2007; Stone 2011). Hau'ofa himself unreservedly refuted this critique, arguing that homogeneity is "neither possible nor desirable" (2008c, 42).

Second, Hau'ofa argued that the contemporary movement of migrants constitutes a "world enlargement" (1994, 151), as through the expansion of the Pacific diaspora, further territories are enveloped within the growing liquid continent of Oceania. In his words, "Oceania is vast, Oceania is expanding" (Hau'ofa 1994, 160). Hau'ofa's concept of world enlargement is somewhat hazy on the details and seems to have received limited critical reception compared to other key ideas in his work. He first introduced the notion in "Our Sea of Islands", when he referred to "the contemporary process of what may be called world enlargement that is carried out by tens of thousands of ordinary Pacific Islanders right across the ocean...making nonsense of all national and economic boundaries...crisscrossing an ocean" (Hau'ofa 1994, 151). In his later work, he reiterated this notion of enlargement through increased mobility and the expansion of social networks and diasporas of Pacific peoples (Hau'ofa 2008c, 41).

This idea of world enlargement as it stands has a number of clear shortcomings. Hau'ofa has fallen afoul of criticism for the overly optimistic view of migration it presents. Rajesh Chandra (1993, 77) took Hau'ofa to task for failing to recognize the hardship emigration produces for those left behind, despite the flow of remittances, as well as the suffering many migrants, exploited by their new host nations, experience. This speaks to a broader skepticism about the geopolitical viability of reframing power in Oceania. Sudesh Mishra applauded Hau'ofa's vision for its "celebratory resistance" yet questioned the extent to which the Pacific Islands have tangible control over their futures, given the power exerted by the Pacific Rim countries (1993, 22). Vijay Naidu has similarly warned that Hau'ofa, in his attempts to reimagine the strength and significance of the Pacific, underestimated the potency of global capitalism (1993). In a further critique of the ability of Oceania's peoples to exert power over national, regional, or global institutions and structural asymmetries, Vanessa Griffen, declared Hau'ofa's Oceania "romantic, appealing and perhaps fictional", and argued that he obscured the extent of urban poverty, exploitation and suffering in the Pacific through his

focus on heroic self-sufficiency (1993, 59). She advocated reckoning with the reality of current social and economic conditions in the islands and insisted that “we need to be angrier over our present as well as pleased with the good things about our past” (Griffen 1993, 62).

Expanding on these ideas, I propose that Hau‘ofa’s very notion of world enlargement needs enlarging. Compared to the ambition and poetry of the rest of his “sea of islands” vision, there is something underwhelming and unfittingly prosaic about the notion that one of the only ways the might, strength and size of the ever-growing Oceania is realized is through Islanders joining the transnational pool of cheaply available labor. It also sits awkwardly with the Warriors’ refusal to become climate refugees and their determination to stay within their own lands.

Instead, I consider other ways Pacific Islanders are agentively transcending the purported smallness of their island worlds—other ways Oceania’s majesty and expanding magnitude are being practically realized—and, in turn, counter the damaging drowning islands discourse. Thus, true to Hau‘ofa’s form, I also use the notion of world enlargement loosely, albeit to differing effect. Through it, I hope to convey a sense of Oceania as being as uncontained and uncontainable as the waters of its namesake and as a specifically Pacific power from below.

Existing academic analyses of the Pacific Climate Warriors have highlighted the flotilla as a demonstration of political agency and a challenge to the inevitability of climate migration (McNamara and Farbotko 2017) and as an example of Indigenous futurity (Goodyear-Ka‘ōpua 2017). As Katerina Teaiwa argued, the Pacific Climate Warriors are one of many recent and increasingly visible Oceanic movements that encourage regional identity and solidarity; combine art, customs and activism; and are partially inspired by Hau‘ofa’s vision (2018). These current manifestations of liberatory rather than elite regionalism (Teaiwa 2018) provide parallels to the Nuclear Free and Independent Pacific Movement, with its pan-Pacific struggles for environmental justice and self-determination and its production of a “globalization from below” (Kuletz 2002, 127), the potential of which Hau‘ofa explicitly acknowledged (2008c, 49). Links between Hau‘ofa’s vision and the Warriors’ actions have also been suggested by Candice Steiner who, based on a close reading of the “Not Drowning but Fighting” pre-flotilla campaign video, maintained that through the use of martial dances, the Warriors are “constructing an identity of unity and empowerment” (2015, 154), an analysis that this article reaffirms. Steiner emphasized the importance of connection between Pacific Islanders and drew a parallel between the “islands in a far sea”/ “sea of islands” and drowning / fighting dichotomies.

Building on Steiner and Teaiwa’s arguments, I take Hau‘ofa’s ideas further by unpacking how these connections and regional identities are formed and how this strengthened Oceania manifests, and I identify empirical shortcomings of Hau‘ofa’s vision. Moreover, I look beyond press releases and campaign videos, using interviews and participant observation to more deeply understand the lived practices of the Warriors as they generate these alternative narratives, including obstacles they encounter that may be excluded from

media accounts. Consequently, I draw on a month of ethnographic research conducted with the Pacific Climate Warriors, during which I accompanied them on their journey, and participated in several key events, including the training and preparation for the flotilla, the flotilla itself, and then follow-on actions in Sydney and Melbourne (table 1). I complemented this period of fieldwork with eighteen semi-structured, qualitative interviews with individual Warriors (including three follow-up interviews), ultimately interviewing just under half of the campaign's participants, and four months ethnographic research in Port Vila, Vanuatu, with 350 Vanuatu, a local chapter of the Pacific Climate Warriors.

Table 1: Key Events in the Pacific Climate Warriors' October 2014 Campaign

Date(s)	Event(s)
9 October	Commencement of pre-flotilla training in Sydney
12-14 October	Visit to Maules Creek, New South Wales, site of proposed coal mine
17 October	Flotilla blockade of Newcastle Harbor, New South Wales
19-22 October	Solidarity actions in Sydney, Canberra, Brisbane, Perth, and Melbourne

Using Epeli Hau'ofa's "sea of islands" vision as a theoretical lens through which to examine the Pacific Climate Warriors' actions, I make three contributions. First, invoking Hulme's provocation to recognize not "what we can do about climate change, but what climate change can do for us" (2009, 326), I argue that climate change activism creates an opportunity for the physical embodiment of Oceanic alliance, connection, and expression of regional identity that Hau'ofa theoretically envisioned. The Warriors, while situated as representatives of their respective nations, began to enact forms of composite, fluid and pan-Pacific identities, as opposed to solely national identities.

Second, climate change creates an opportunity not just to reinforce existing power relations between the Pacific Islands and the rest of the world but also to subvert and even invert them. To substantiate this, I invoke Hau'ofa's concept of "world enlargement" as one foundation for a counter-discourse that emphasizes the potential for the Pacific Islands to confront climate change. In doing so, however, I suggest that Hau'ofa's notion of world enlargement itself needs enlarging, and I refashion this concept in light of the Warriors' actions. More specifically, I consider the role of domesticity in the Warriors' experiences of climate change and analyze the flotilla as a means of "bringing climate change home", an action that enlarges Oceania beyond its boundaries, as the Pacific and its problems can no longer be contained within its islands. The emphasis on the Pacific as acting for and on behalf of the world constitutes a form of world enlargement. I

also identify the decolonial impulses at play, in terms of the Warriors' stated need to reeducate the Australian government due to its ignorance.

While recognizing these to be key features of a “sea of islands approach”, I acknowledge the limitations of applying such a model to this case. For instance, I draw upon the oft-cited critique of Hau‘ofa’s work that its pan-Pacific vision conceals intraregional differences and inequities. I hazard this also to be the case with the Pacific Climate Warriors, noting the underrepresentation of Micronesia and the absence of many countries. However, the model of regionalism produced and performed through the flotilla is one that acknowledges inequalities and difference. Crucially, I identify discourses of “relative altitudinal privilege”, which engage empathetically with narratives of submersion and loss, but with a specificity that rejects the reduction of the Pacific to an anonymous inundated atoll. Consequently, there are shortcomings in Hau‘ofa’s vision and in the Pacific Climate Warriors’ practices, in combination they lay the foundation for a Pacific-based counter-discourse that challenges disempowering discourses of drowning islands and helpless islanders.

Performing National and Pan-Pacific Identities

The Pacific Climate Warriors campaign engendered forms of non-homogenized Oceanic regionalism, as the Warriors used customary dress, flags, and, most significantly, song and dance to express both distinctness and unity. Many of the Warriors clearly understood themselves as national representatives, rather than mere individuals taking action, and they took great pride in that role and identity. Indeed, many referred to each other using their countries as monikers, rather than their first names. For instance, Priscilla proudly grounded her presence in Australia in terms of her regional and local affiliations:

I must stand as a warrior representing my own country, my own land, my own family.
Stand and must fight against climate change effects that are affecting our islands...To
be a warrior it’s a bit interesting because we are representing our own cultures here,
our own unique customs here, and our own traditions here as well. (Priscilla, Solomon
Islands)^{iv}

As Priscilla highlighted, this patriotic act of representation is premised on an articulation of difference from other island cultures.

Still, this emphasis on the Warrior acting as metonym for the nation also caused some participants conflict between personal interests and national duty. This became pertinent in relation to one of the most powerful of national insignia: the flag. One participant questioned her own legitimacy to represent her country due to her somewhat misleading communication with those back home in Niue regarding the name

of the event (like some others she had inventively described the risky direct-action protest as a “conference”^v). As a result, she didn’t feel she had genuine governmental endorsement for her actions and thus felt unable to fly her national flag during the protest. To both her relief and her disappointment, her father gave her ex post-facto confirmation that the government was completely behind her and that she should have held her flag high.

Many of the warriors recognized that they were representing not just their particular islands but the region as a whole. Leah, one of the Warriors' key media spokespeople, acknowledged her role as speaking for Oceania and for places even further afield:

The Pacific Climate Warrior is not just the face of the Marshall Islands, it’s the face of the whole Pacific. It’s the face of Fiji, Tokelau, Vanuatu, Tuvalu, and standing up for the Pacific and also standing in solidarity with those around the world that are facing climate change impacts. (Leah, 350 Marshall Islands)

Underlying this regional representation was an ideal of Pacific unity. Samson captured this while subverting notions of nationhood as based on separate, independent jurisdictions. According to his defiant proclamation, all Pacific Islands are united under one nation:

We are fighting for our lives, fighting for our people, and if we stand together as one nation from different countries, anything is possible. They will hear our voice.
(Samson, 350 Niue)

While the responsibilities of representation were treated with much gravity, there was also an evident playfulness and fluidity in terms of the national and cultural identities performed. One participant from Tuvalu spent much of the pre-flotilla trip to the site of a proposed coal mine draped in and posing with a Tongan flag (Figure 1); during the flotilla, he became the official captain of the Fiji canoe. Meanwhile, Vanuatu customary dress was gifted to one of the Tokelauan participants, who then proudly wore it throughout the post-flotilla solidarity action in Melbourne. These material acts of exchange disrupted the language of traditionalism the Warriors’ campaign was popularly couched in, with media accounts focused on the “traditional dressed” Warriors and “traditional canoes” (Queally 2014; Kelly 2014). Yet, unbeknownst to the majority of the Western audiences, through the borrowing and gifting of fabrics and flags, in many cases the traditions Warriors displayed were those of other Warriors' nations. These gift-giving acts, undocumented in media accounts, were performed not for audience consumption but rather for the Warriors themselves in the production of Pacific connections and Oceanic identities.^{vi} Thus, while these performances of pan-Pacific identities may have appeared homogenous to external audiences, internally there was still a recognition of the diversity and uniqueness of cultures.



Figure 1 - A Tuvaluan Warrior, adorned in a Tongan flag, near Tarrawonga mine, in New South Wales, Australia. Photo by Jeff Tan. Reproduced with permission.

These Oceanic identities were also performed through a powerful form of musical bricolage. At the conclusion of the blockade, the Warriors sang a multilingual version of the charity hit single “We are the world” (Jackson & Ritchie 1985), with each country’s representatives contributing a line of the chorus translated into one of their nation’s tongues. While the song was originally developed as a celebrity fundraising effort in response to famine in Ethiopia and later rerecorded and released in response to the 2010 earthquake in Haiti (Jackson & Ritchie 2010), its appropriation for a moment of Indigenous Pacific resistance to the fossil-fuel industry was apt in both form and content. Through the act of combining their respective languages into one song, the Warriors both imagined and enacted the dissolution of national and cultural boundaries between the Pacific Islanders. The significance for Pacific liberation of speaking in Indigenous rather than colonial tongues can also not be overstated (Hau‘ofa’ 2008a). Moreover, the song’s lyrics emphasize achievement through unity (“Let us realize that a change can only come/ When we stand together as one”); announces the shared Judeo-Christian identity of participants (“We are all a part of God’s great big family”) and, in the context of the flotilla performance, can be interpreted as highlighting the current realities of climate change impacts (“There are people dying”). Most crucially in its transposition from eighties’ American pop superstars to twenty-first-century Islander climate activists, the song challenges notions of victimhood and agency in accordance with the Warriors’ campaign mantra, “We are not drowning, we are fighting”. It calls out the ongoing apathy of Australia and other fossil-fuel intensive nations (“We can’t go on pretending day by day/ That someone, somehow will soon make a change”) and transforms the otherwise

glib and incongruous line “We’re saving our own lives” into a cry of action and defiance grounded in the lived experience of suffering. Thus, in its own way, this repurposing acts to challenge the drowning islands discourse.

Pan-Pacific cultural hybridization also emerged through a haka (Figure 2), which was performed on the beach before the canoe launching (and later that evening in a local bar). With different participants leading different segments, all the men engaged in a dance that combined Tongan, Samoan, Fijian, Tokelauan, Solomon Islander, Ni-Vanuatu and Maori ceremonial dance—a composite haka. In this act, singular representations of national identities dissolved, and a fearsome vision of pan-Pacific strength and unity was performed. Thus, the way in which flags, attire and dances circulated spoke to a group whose actions broke out of national silos and instead performed a sense of interconnected Oceanic islandness.



Figure 2 - The conclusion of the composite haka performed at the Maules Creek coal mine blockade camp in New South Wales, Australia. Photo by Jeff Tan. Reproduced with permission.

This expression of regional identity chimes with Hau‘ofa’s centering of exchange in the creation of collective identity, as he argues that Pacific Islander “cultures have always been hybrid and hybridising, for we have always given to and taken from our neighbours and others we encounter” (Hau‘ofa 2008b, 63). The choice of music and dance as the tools for forging these Oceanic identities is also fitting given Hau‘ofa’s focus in his later years on the creation and development of the Oceania Centre for Arts and Culture at the University of the South Pacific. His directorship of the centre and ongoing aspirations for region building

were explicitly interlinked; he argued that “the centre’s emphasis on Oceanic forms and identity in artistic and cultural production should contribute significantly to regional cooperation and unity in our part of the world” (Hau‘ofa 2008a, 87). In particular, Hau‘ofa saw the centre as a site for cross-cultural fluidity and dialogue—for “enmeshing, fusing, and hybridizing different aesthetic traditions” (Naidu 2010, 118). In this light, the composite haka can be seen as exemplary. The circumstances of the songs and the haka also resonate with Hau‘ofa’s vision for the Centre, as he saw it as imperative that Oceanians “harness creativity to our practical struggle for survival” particularly in response to “the most important global environmental agenda” (2008a, 87).

Climate change activism, in the form of the Pacific Climate Warrior campaign, created an opportunity for the physical embodiment of Oceanic alliance, connection, and expression of regional identity that Hau‘ofa theoretically envisioned. While the Warriors had strong national attachments, they also expressed pan-Pacific identity through the exchange of customary dress and flags and through the production of a composite song and a composite haka, highly pertinent art forms given Hau‘ofa’s emphasis on song and dance as mediums for the manifestation of Oceanic identity.

Returning to Hau‘ofa’s overall argument, viewing the region as an interconnected ‘sea of islands’ as opposed to small, isolated nations in a vast sea, is the foundation for the collective power of Oceania and for an alternative understanding of the Pacific Islands that rejects their belittlement. To understand how this vision of Oceania could challenge the drowning islands discourse and realize its collective power, it is useful to consider Hau‘ofa’s concept of world enlargement.

We are the World: Pacific Climate Warriors and Ever-Expanding Oceania

Two processes central to this formulation of world enlargement occurred through the Pacific Climate Warriors’ campaign. First, the problems and concerns of the Pacific Islands could not be contained within the islands, and through the action, they overflowed into Australia and further afield, an act that can be seen as “bringing climate change home”. Second, the Warriors situated their work as acting for and on behalf of the world, thereby globalizing their actions and intentions. Through the blockade, the Warriors sought to present the Pacific as an example to the world, promoting a form of decolonizing reeducation for the Australian government.

The very act of holding the blockade in Australia can be seen as a form of world enlargement. It asserts that Pacific Islander suffering, due to intensified cyclones and unprecedented king tides, can no longer be contained within those islands and is instead brought home to its source. In this movement, the Australian coal industry was enveloped by the ever-enlarging Oceania in an attempt to bring the industry to account for

its actions. Such incorporation of Australia into Oceania is key to challenging the Pacific Islands' subordination, as much of Australia's belittlement of the Pacific emerges from a presumption that it is above and outside the Pacific Islands region yet still has a special position as its manager (Fry 1997).^{vii}

This enlargement of Oceania beyond its assumed boundaries can be understood as a means of “bringing climate change home”. While operating within a very distinct political tradition, in using this phrase I draw parallels with the Weather Underground and the Red Army Faction's modus operandi of “bringing the war home”, a concept that violence can no longer be externalized, unseen and forgotten, but that those responsible for its production are confronted by its existence, experiencing it in microcosm. This could perhaps be seen most literally during the post-blockade action in Canberra where activists simulated waves in the offices of the Australian Minerals Council, and during an action the following year by some Warriors who created a “Pacific Climate Refugee Camp” on the streets of Auckland.

This notion of bringing climate change home has previously been utilized to somewhat different purposes by Rachel Slocum (2004), for whom this phrase indicates the necessity of making abstract global climate change meaningful and local. This draws out the final element of this tactic—the notion of home—as it highlights the role of domesticity in the Warriors' experiences and fears of climate change.

Home, both as a sense of place in the world and as a household dwelling, appeared frequently in the Warriors' discussions. For instance, Leah's account brings climate change home (in Slocum's sense of making it local and tangible) through the evocation of the loss of home, the word itself appearing five times in quick succession:

The Marshalls is barely three meters about sea level. It's flat land. There's no mountains, no hills, no rivers, no streams and it's very narrow land. So when sea level rises and high tides come in, it washes into people's homes, destroys their homes and they're left displaced and so have to look for a new home...it's a very devastating situation because you live in a home where you've been for your whole life and then all of a sudden, you know, the waves come crashing in and destroy everything...everything you've owned in that home. And you're left with nothing. (Leah, 350 Marshall Islands)

Samson explicitly used this tactic of bringing home climate change by asking me to put myself in another's shoes and, crucially, to imagine my home in another locale, thereby addressing me both as Western interviewer and as imagined Islander, with home and land to lose.

Imagine your family, like you swap sides, if you were at the Pacific and we were at your house, just sitting there. How would you feel? Put yourself in their position. And I will

tell you that you will fight. You will do the same thing. You should understand that.
(Samson, 350 Niue)

Finally, Maria, remembering the one coal ship that was not successfully halted, presented one of the most powerful articulations of the polysemic concept of home:

The only thing that pushed us on was knowing we were there for a purpose. We were there to stop the coal mine, to stop the coal ships. And then going into the day, when we saw the coal ship pass by, we all cried, it was so emotional because, like, we know what the coal does to us, the Islanders, and so, watching it go by, all that was in our head was, like, a family will lose their home today. A family will lose their livestock. A family will even lose their own livelihoods. Maybe their home. (Maria, 350 Fiji)

In her account, Maria envisions the disrupted domesticity of a single family, with the loss of home reiterated as one of the most prevailing threats. In connecting the fossil-fuel industry directly to this loss of home (“what the coal does to us”), she makes the consequences of carbon combustion specific, localized and directly attributional: it is brought home, or made tangible to those who heed her words. And locating this direct impact not, for instance, in the erosion of a specific patch of coastline, but in the destruction of family life, she presents the act as morally reprehensible. In this passage we also witness a third form of “bringing home”, or the need to stop these acts of violence at their source through direct intervention (“we were there for a purpose...we were there to stop the coal ships”). This serves as a further indication of world enlargement, as climate change as a problem is no longer contained within the Pacific Islands but is instead brought back to Australia, engulfing Australia within this Oceanic concern.

The Warriors were adamant that it wasn’t just *their* homes that were threatened. A second dimension of Oceanic world enlargement revolves around taking on global concerns as Pacific concerns. Hau’ofa foresaw a need for Oceania to “link up with the rest of the world” in order to prevent environmental destruction, arguing that, both literally and figuratively, “the sea unites the entire world” (1993, 139). The emphasis on the need for the Pacific Islands to assist the rest of the world also fundamentally challenges the presumption that they are small and isolated “islands in a far sea” that require rescue. Rather, it is those island nations united that are reaching out in order to assist their neighbors: a manifestation of the powerful, ever-enlarging Oceania. As Leah articulated:

I just wanted to remind everybody that this is not a fight that’s only for the Pacific.
This is everybody’s fight. This is a common fight. And we’re just really passionate about it because our islands are at the front line. And we just want to get our message out there, get our stories out there, so that more people can hear about them and join

us because there's not one country that's not affected by climate change. (Leah, 350 Marshall Islands)

Leah's message was reiterated throughout the campaign: the Warriors' actions were not just motivated by their own self-interest and the interests of their national communities; rather, they were taken for the sake of the whole world, both now and for future generations to come. This again exemplifies world enlargement, as Pacific Islanders began to act globally, and Oceania's concerns became a metonym for global concerns.

As a further dimension of world enlargement, the Warriors were not just attempting to act on behalf of the world but also to set an example to the world through doing so. This notion of Oceania as exemplar involved both a showcasing of superior Pacific values and a decolonial attempt to reeducate Australia, highlighting the folly of its ways. Joseph captured this sense of Pacific values in his comparison between the Pacific Islands and Australia:

We are small islands but... we are the mighty Pacific Ocean...even though, you know, they have the bigger land, but as Pacific Islanders we have the biggest hearts. (Joseph, 350 Federated States of Micronesia) ^{viii}

Other Warriors echoed this "large-heartedness" through reference to a more compassionate and down-to-earth approach to life found within the islands, compared to attitudes within Australia. "Australia", as invoked by the Warriors, did not implicate the country's whole population, as the Warriors were enormously supported by many Australian activists and built new relations of respect, solidarity, and connection with Aboriginal Australians through several avenues, including partnering with an Indigenous youth climate justice network (who led a procession during the flotilla), participating in Welcome to Country ceremonies, and visiting sites of Aboriginal-led struggle against gentrification^{ix}. Instead, "Australia" primarily referenced the government and fossil fuel industries, whose actions the Warriors highlighted as shameful in comparison with the examples of proactive responses to climate change by many Pacific Island governments:

Taking the example from the Tokelau islands, I mean they're already been 100% renewable energy, and if the other Pacific Islands could follow that same step and then take the lead of renewable energy, then it would really teach a good example to Australia, so they could see us, and it would be really a good effective motivation also for Australia. (Moses, 350 Vanuatu)

Crucially through this example-setting, Moses also expresses a need to "teach" and motivate Australia. In a speech given after a solidarity action in Melbourne, one of the Warriors reiterated this need for

Australia to be reeducated by the Pacific Islands, but through an explicitly decolonial rejection of Australian modes of education, compared with Pacific Island models of knowledge:

Colonialism is over. You don't just tell us what to do. Because we know what to do. We are clever people in the Pacific. We are educated people. We are educated by guiding our canoes by the sun and the stars. We just have a different education. We want you to come and learn that with us. Not just learning in universities: that's not as good as learning how to live a sustainable future. (Reuben, 350 Tokelau)

The imperative to alleviate the Australian fossil fuel companies' ignorance was often tied to a call for polluters to bear witness to the impacts in the islands:

These people or this industry, they need to go to the islands to actually see the impacts that it's causing. So, then they actually know what we are on about, instead of just saying "oh we don't know what we're doing. Why are you doing that?" (Rachael, 350 Niue)

This pedagogical overture towards Australia demonstrates both a decolonial impulse and a potentially naive presumption of an information deficit underlying existing actions. Beginning with the first aspect, Greg Fry identified the circulation of a "doomdayism" discourse about the Pacific Islands, which is broadcast by Australia media commentators and policy officials (1997). This discourse presumes that the Pacific Islands are headed towards an inevitable "future nightmare of overcrowding, poverty, mass unemployment, serious environmental degradation, and a decline in health standards" unless they heed Australia's salvific message and change their ways, particularly through structural adjustment policies (Fry 1997, 306). Fry saw this discourse as a continuation of Australia's belittling approach to the Pacific Islands during the Cold War, one that stems from a racist presumption that Australia has the right to manage its island neighbors.

In their attempts to reeducate, the Warriors actively subvert the doomdayism discourse. No longer is "Australia...cast both as model and savior of the Pacific" (Jolly 2007, 527). Instead, it is Australia that is held responsible for the impending apocalypse and Pacific Islanders who are presenting the message of salvation. Moreover, it an opportunity to turn the tables and actively reeducate those nations who had for so long imposed their systems of knowledge upon Oceania. One Warrior put it explicitly:

In the past we sort of always listened, you know, the islands always listened to the Europeans, and I think it's about time now for them to listen to us, to our call, to our need. (Eve, 350 Kiribati)

Through their call, the Warriors highlighted the parochialism of continental thought, as Australia and other polluting nations have failed to genuinely look beyond their own borders and recognize the consequences of their actions. It stands as a further example of world enlargement, as rather than being small and marginal, the potency of the Pacific Islands is expanding to the point that they take on the responsibility of educating their neighbors.

The power of an enlarged Oceania vis-à-vis Australia was invoked in other ways. During a training event held in Sydney, the organizer declared that while Pacific Islanders would not be at the big table making decisions about the future of fossil-fuel extraction, “they can take action in their backyard: Australia”. The image of Australia as backyard conveys Pacific ownership; it inverts the relation of center and periphery between Australia and the Pacific (as through this metaphor the Pacific is presumably figured as the home), and it invokes the specter of NIMBYism,^x but in a manner that has been transnationally refigured.

Yet the desire to inform and reeducate Australia also relies on an information deficit model, or the notion that the solution lies in a simple increase in dissemination of expert knowledge (Burgess, Harrison, and Filius 1998). Through this approach, Australian government inaction (or the perpetuation of destructive action) is rendered morally comprehensible. Many Warriors suspected that large numbers of Australians must not be truly conscious of the consequences of their nation’s actions, or they cast the fossil-fuel companies themselves as being in a state of explicit ignorance. These assumptions profess a faith in the underlying goodwill of the fossil-fuel companies. This could be read as a form of overly generous rationalization, as well as a homogenization of Australia as a nation and of its capacity to act. It is perhaps linked to the ambivalent and aid-intensive relationship between Australia and many Pacific Island countries and a desire not to bite the hand that feeds. Ultimately, this manifestation of a powerful, expanding Oceania, which brings climate change home and acts as an example to and on behalf of the world, is potentially hamstrung by this presumption of the fossil-fuel industry’s naivety.

The actions of the Pacific Climate Warriors can thus be understood as a form of world enlargement that extends Hau‘ofa’s original presentation of the concept as simply the dispersal of a Pacific workforce. These acts of world enlargement express Pacific strength and contest the drowning islands discourse: it is through displaying their potency as part of an expanding, unified continent that the Warriors reinforce the claim that they are not drowning but fighting. However, there may be practical limitations to these expressions of Oceanic power and to the inclusivity of this vision. To this end, it is necessary to consider some shortcomings of Hau‘ofa’s analysis for this particular case.

Regional Inequities and Relative Altitudinal Privilege

These expressions of world enlargement and Oceanic interconnection—as demonstrated through both the representation of regional identities and the fluid intermingling of different cultures—are key features of a “sea of islands” approach and indicate its potential for this as a counter-discourse to the drowning islands narrative. However, just as Hau‘ofa’s work has been criticized for potentially concealing intraregional differences and inequities (Naidu 1993), there are parallels with the Warriors, including the under-representation of Micronesia, the absence of many countries in the campaign, and a bias towards Polynesia in terms of the number of participants.

Rather than dismissing the Warriors’ actions or Hau‘ofa’s approach because of these concerns, it is important to highlight the model of regionalism being produced and performed through the flotilla is one that acknowledges inequalities and difference. Significantly, it includes discourses of “relative altitudinal privilege,” which engage empathetically with narratives of inundation and loss but do so with a specificity that rejects the reduction of the Pacific to an anonymous submerged atoll. As a result, there is still potential for understanding the “sea of islands” approach as a counter-discourse to the drowning islands narrative and as one whose many key tenets are being embodied and practiced by Pacific Islanders on the ground.

Firstly, the true regionalism of the Pacific Climate Warriors campaign must be questioned, particularly with regard to how well it represented all parts of Oceania and the extent to which it perpetuated a bias towards Polynesia. The thirty participants hailed from twelve different nations, out of a possible twenty-six Pacific Island countries and territories. Organizers from 350 Pacific—the nongovernmental organization with which the Pacific Climate Warriors were affiliated—were aware that there were gaps in their coverage, but they identified these gaps as emerging from pragmatic concerns and limited capacity, as opposed to a lack of enthusiasm for full regional representation. While bringing together Warriors from so many different countries was undeniably an impressive feat, these gaps in participation reflected inequities in 350 Pacific’s relationship with different parts of the region. None of the countries that were missing from the flotilla were successfully brought on board for the following year’s Vatican-based campaign, and none of them had one of their compatriots elected to the first Pacific Consultative Group (a governing body of 350 Pacific) in 2015. The absence of the three French territories (New Caledonia, Wallis and Futuna, and French Polynesia) suggests the significance of language differences or a potential privileging of sovereign states over territories.

Moreover, there are also limitations to how much the uniqueness or diversity of the Pacific Islands can be realized when relying on the nation state as a framing device, as many Warriors identified more strongly with their specific home island, as opposed to the nation of their citizenship. For instance, joking questions were raised over authenticity and protocol regarding the Solomon Islands canoe: Priscilla was not

suitable to be the captain given her gender, but the canoe was of her province, not Jeremiah's (her male counterpart), meaning the suitability of his claim to captaincy was also in doubt. Although eventually resolved in Jeremiah's favor, this episode highlighted questions regarding identity and representation as premised on citizenship.

Moreover, within the composition of the existing Warriors, there were clear discrepancies between the sizes of different subregional contingents. There were 20 Polynesian participants, compared to only 7 Melanesians participants and 3 Micronesians. This calculation places Fiji within the category of Melanesia due to its membership in the Melanesian Spearhead Group. If following Hau'ofa's argument that Fiji can also be included in Polynesia for "geographic and cultural reasons" (Hau'ofa 1994, 161), then the disparity is further heightened. These numbers are partly explained by the different islands' recruitment practices. While some national groups only filled the two slots per country that were funded by 350 Pacific, 350 Tonga encouraged community funding of additional participants, sending their Warrior count into the double digits.

However, this disparity also potentially reflects the systemic underrepresentation of Micronesia (Hanlon 2009), an underrepresentation felt keenly by one Micronesian Warrior:

Of all the Warriors I only share geographically [*sic*] location with one of them, the Marshallese Islander...I was expecting that it was going to be more than just the two of us coming from Micronesia. But then again, I am really glad that it wasn't just myself. I had somebody else from Micronesia who can both support the movement^{xi}.
(Joseph, 350 Federated States of Micronesia)

This inequitable inclusion also highlights another key critique of Hau'ofa's regional vision. Perhaps in its shared bias towards Polynesians, the Warriors' campaign was indeed very true to the "sea of islands" vision.

The Warriors also experienced power differentials along gender lines. While the "Warrior" framing was inclusively androgynous (as has been noted by McNamara and Farbotko 2017) and the organizers were conscious about gender balance among the Warriors acting as media spokespeople, in terms of absolute numbers, the campaign was male dominated, and in practice the action in many ways reinforced traditional gender roles. Women largely did not have a role in building the canoes, did not act as captains, and mostly stayed on shore during the flotilla.

The performances of the composite haka became another site for the reinforcement of gender boundaries. Although one of the segments was originally contributed by a female Warrior who had participated in earlier iterations, thereby disrupting the otherwise all-male space, in more formal performances she was not able to take part. The leadership of that segment instead fell to her male compatriot, who lacked

her expertise in that particular dance. Thus, while the haka created an opportunity for a slight challenge to the boundaries of acceptably gendered behavior, ultimately these boundaries were firmly reinstated. Moreover, during the flotilla preparation, both the men and women worked on their own separate dance performances, but only the men's dance was incorporated into the flotilla itself, projecting a masculine interpretation of what it was to be a Warrior. However, none of the Warriors objected to this gendered division of roles, perhaps further indicating an emphasis on difference rather than homogeneity.^{xii}

While these inequities were present, rather than a homogenizing model of pan-Pacific unity, the form of regionalism produced and performed through the flotilla was one that acknowledged inequality and difference. Crucially, this difference revolved around perceptions of “relative altitudinal privilege”: an individual's privilege based on the topographical elevation of their home nation and presumed associated degree of exposure to climate change impacts in comparison with others. A common motif running through the interviews was the relative good fortune of the volcanic island nations, compared with sorrow and sympathy for the low-lying atoll dwellers. For instance, Rachael contrasted the suffering she had personally experienced through extreme weather events with the greater suffering of those living on atolls:

Niue was hit by the cyclone, Cyclone Heta, in 2004 and the impacts of that, we're still living with it... And it's like how lucky I am to survive, but then I was thinking about the other islands like Tuvalu who... Since we're a highland, we have cliffs and all that. We're lucky to have that. As for Tuvalu, they're actually, like, slowly sinking. (Rachael, 350 Niue)

By engaging with discourses of relative altitudinal privilege, many Warriors mitigated their own sense of exposure to climate change impacts. In Priscilla's account, this goes to the extreme of essentially dismissing climate change impacts in the Solomon Islands.

Actually, our government, they didn't take strong action towards this because Solomon Islands are different from other Pacific countries. We have higher land. We have higher mountains. Our lands are just fine. We just have the sea level rise that are affecting our small villages in the provinces, but not seriously. We are definitely completely OK but some of the climate changes that affect us which is such as [ʒi] the tsunami and all that, flooding and all that. (Priscilla, 350 Solomon Islands)

One Warrior went as far as to consciously visualize himself as an atoll dweller in order to engender a feeling of unity with his fellow Warriors and to motivate himself to take action.

We might not be the same in relation to our island vulnerability. My island, we have mountains, we have high elevations but compared to the Marshallese and some of the Solomon Islands, they all have flat, flat islands. So, I tried to put myself into their positions—if my island is their island or if their island is my island—so we can both have the same mentality going through what we are here for. So yesterday, when we sailed out our canoes, I really felt how they felt about coming here: what they were pushing, what they are here for, and their main purpose for coming here. I really felt what they feel. (Joseph, 350 Federated States of Micronesia)

Joseph's words complicate the notion that all the Warriors are equally threatened, imminently and personally, by the impacts of climate change. Downplaying lived experience in favor of imagining oneself in another's less fortunate position subverts the campaign's own claims to authenticity, grounded as they are in the presentation of the Warriors as bona fide climate change survivors. It contrasts with the claims in the video "Canoes vs. Coal," produced in collaboration with the Pacific Climate Warriors, that "climate change is real, and we are here to put the message across that we live the realities of climate change" (Yacono 2014). It also opens up questions about how processes of representation occur: were the Warriors, as national representatives, standing in for all those other Islanders affected by climate change, as symbols and delegates, or did they, as individuals, embody direct experiences of threat and suffering?

Joseph's statement also indicates that this hierarchy of peril and suffering is far from objective. He explicitly designates one country (Solomon Islands) as being worthy of empathy, yet, as discussed, Priscilla, who is from Solomon Islands, disavowed her nation's position of need. Meanwhile, other Warriors presented the narrative of imminently sinking islands in relation to the fate of the atoll states. This was accompanied by a sense of great pity, as evident in a radio interview with one of the Warriors:

Well, some of the islands like Kiribati, Tuvalu, and Tokelau have been given a couple of years. Before you know, their islands are covered by water. And for these people they have nowhere else to go... This is urgent for us. We need to find a way to keep their island above water, we need to find a way to make sure they have a place to call home and their children and their children's children also have a place to call home. (ABC Brisbane 2014)

In drawing on these images, the Warriors engaged empathetically with narratives of submersion and loss, doing so with a specificity that rejected the reduction of all of the Pacific Islands to an anonymous inundated atoll. This approach complicates both the narrative of inevitable inundation and the "we are not drowning but fighting" counter-narrative: it suggests "*we* are not drowning, *they* are". As the Warriors position

themselves as acting for others rather than for their own nations or themselves, the authenticity of the majority of their actions is again complicated.

These comparisons of island size were multidirectional, as Warriors positioned themselves not only in relation to the flatter and less fortunate but also with respect to Australia as a giant of the region:

Australia is very fortunate to be such a big, big island. Most of us our islands are small enough that even a tsunami can come from one side and go to the other. It can cover the whole island. Australia need to understand that even though they think they are the mother of all Pacific Island countries, they still have a responsibility to look after the small islands. (Maria, 350 Fiji)

Emphasizing Australia's islandness underlined the nation's responsibility to its neighbors and highlighted its complicity in rising emissions. Through this understanding, Australia is brought into a Pacific Islands context, engulfed within Oceania, an effect reminiscent of the movements of world enlargement. This returns us to Joseph's claim that Australia's "bigger land" is superseded by Oceania's "bigger hearts", and it challenges Australia's tendency to position itself "ambiguously as both inside and outside the region" (Jolly 2007, 529). However, this understanding of Australia also potentially essentializes it as a nation in terms of its values and capacity to act.

As a consequence, while there are inequities and disparities within this expression of Oceanic interconnection, this manifestation of regional unity was itself predicated on forms of disparity in relation to perceived vulnerability to climate impacts. While outwardly presenting themselves as on the front lines of climate change, internally, the Warriors—particularly those from volcanic islands—were keen to emphasize their own relative altitudinal privilege with respect to those from atoll states. This act served to further refute any labels of victimhood, reinforces their campaign mantra that they are "not drowning", and, akin to Hau'ofa's vision of Pacific unity, emphasized island distinction rather than homogeneity.

Conclusion

In combination, Hau'ofa's ideas and the Warriors' actions provide an alternative framing of climate change that contests the drowning islands discourse. Hau'ofa's work helps us to understand the actions the Warriors took and the manner in which they were contesting the marginalization of the Pacific. Not only that, the presentation of Pacific Islanders as one of climate change's iconic victims and the opportunity this presented for the Warriors to challenge not just the drowning islands discourse but also the more general belittlement of Oceania help us to understand what Hau'ofa's vision can look like in practice and what it can

achieve. Such a critical reworking of Hau‘ofa’s previously underutilized concept of world enlargement—to incorporate not just movements of diaspora but also the globalized intentions and actions of Pacific Islander climate activist networks—demonstrates the many ways in which other nations could be conceptually subsumed within Oceania and the many avenues through which actors may seek to invert power dynamics between Pacific Islands and their continental neighbors, thus challenging concepts of relative scale and size.

Through an in-depth ethnographic engagement with the Warriors’ practices, including actively accompanying them and participating in their campaign, I have demonstrated the ambiguities and tensions in the Warriors’ actions that complicate media representations of the Warriors as all simply and equally on the front lines of climate change. These complexities are apparent through their engagement in discourses of relative altitudinal privilege that disrupt public accounts of their vulnerability and through the swapping of flags and fabrics that generate pan-Pacific identities that counter simplistic media representations of authenticity and traditionalism. As well as strength and joy, the Warriors’ actions were characterized by ambivalence, fear and doubt—about their ability to represent their home nations, about the reactions of their families to the potential risks, and about sacrifices inherent to participating in the campaign. In recognizing these ambivalences and nuances of the Warriors’ practices, I celebrate the Warriors’ actions but caution against treating them as symbols or ciphers in which to place all our hopes about Pacific strength in the face of climate change.

* * *

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ⁱ The twelve nations included Fiji, Vanuatu, Solomon Islands, Papua New Guinea, Sāmoa, Tuvalu, Tokelau, Tonga, Niue, Kiribati, the Federated States of Micronesia and the Marshall Islands.

ⁱⁱ Direct action refers to political acts that attempt a direct intervention—such as reducing emissions by blocking coal ships—rather than petitioning others to act on one’s behalf.

ⁱⁱⁱ I acknowledge the contentions surrounding the labels “Melanesia”, “Micronesia”, and “Polynesia” (Jolly 2007), but I retain their usage given the place of these labels in positive Pacific self-identification (Kabutaulaka 2015), as well as their practical utilization by the Warriors.

^{iv} All interviewee names are pseudonyms. Anonymization presented significant ethical dilemmas in terms of participants' wishes for recognition for their actions and stories versus institutional regulations intended to protect their identities (see Fair 2018, 98-101).

^v Concerns regarding youth, direct-action risk, and familial shame shaped the Warriors' practices. Those under twenty-five years old were discouraged from entering the shipping lane during the flotilla due to potential for arrest and the consequent impacts on employability and migration. This prohibition conflicts with framings of the Pacific Climate Warriors as a youth movement, although in practice many younger Warriors did transgress into the shipping lane (Fair 2018, 171-173, 179). However, these direct-action tactics were not a youthful rebellion against conventional modes of government lobbying and state engagement by elders, as a number of Warriors also participated as civil society delegates to international climate summits or were actively supported by their own governments.

^{vi} This reflects the long, well-established, and well-documented history of borrowing and gifting in the region (Strathern 1988; Godelier 1999).

^{vii} While Australia can be geopolitically defined as within Oceania, Hau'ofa's vision of Oceania largely excludes it, except where it is gradually encompassed through processes of world enlargement through the presence of Pacific Islands diaspora. While Hau'ofa sometimes advocated for an inclusive vision of Oceania, electing that "anyone who has lived in our region and is committed to Oceania is an Oceanian" (2008c, 51), he also emphasized the importance of Islanders building connections with the 'tangata whenua of Aotearoa and... with the Native Hawaiians" (1994, 156), suggesting that islandness and indigeneity are fundamental to Oceania.

^{viii} While none of the Warriors explicitly cited Hau'ofa, repeated claims that "we are the mighty Pacific Ocean" came close to a direct acknowledgement of his work.

^{ix} For more on Indigenous solidarity and the Pacific Climate Warriors see Fair 2018, 125-127.

^x NIMBYism, an academically disputed phenomenon, refers to localized opposition to the development of energy infrastructure close to one's residence (ie, "not in my backyard"), while advocating a generalized need for this infrastructure elsewhere (Devine-Wright 2005).

^{xi} The discrepancy between Joseph's figure of two Micronesians and mine of three is presumably due to him overlooking the presence of a quiet Warrior from Kiribati.

^{xii} For further discussions of gender in the Pacific Climate Warrior campaign, including the role of Warriors with identities beyond the gender binary see Fair 2018, 134-139.

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