

Resistance to Empire and Militarization
Reclaiming the Sacred

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Existential Threats to the Pacific Islands: Oceania Resists the Long Reach of Empire

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Learn to love the land and the people, and then you will know what you are fighting for.

—Belau Roman Bedor (cited in de Ishtar 1994: 236)

Introduction

The Pacific Ocean area covering the north and south Pacific referred here, is the area containing 26 Pacific Island countries, which includes independent and self-governing territories. There are several colonies of France in the region (French Polynesia, New Caledonia, Wallis and Futuna Islands, for example) and self-governing but not fully autonomous countries connected to New Zealand (Cook Islands, Niue). The United States has ongoing special Compacts of Free Association with its former Trust Territory countries (now Federated States of Micronesia, Marshall Islands, Palau) but it retains Guam as a military base. The US compacts of free association with the above countries, retain economic dependence and certain political controls. The Pacific Island Forum Secretariat (PIFS), originally set up for independent states as decolonization occurred, lists 16 independent and self-governing members, but has recently included, for example, French Polynesia, which is still a colony of France.

For the purposes of the discussion in this chapter, the analysis in all the sections refers to the Pacific Island region as a whole, including all Pacific Island countries regardless of political status that have a shared Pacific cultural and social identity as Pacific Islanders. On Pacific Island responses to militarization, land grabs, and sea bed resource exploitation, the chapter concentrates on the options of resistance and desistance. In the case of land grab legislation, independent states where there is legal recognition of those countries' formal rights of control over their lands, seas and natural resources the state has full jurisdiction over its territory and governance. This is to recognize that Pacific Island states do have powers of resistance and their leaders can use such powers.

The chapter is an exploration of three different areas of colonial and post-colonial impacts shared by many in Pacific islands and raises questions on what forms of resistance now and in the past, can be used by Pacific Islanders in response to globalization.

The Pacific Island Region: Cultural and Ethnic Sub-regions

Three broad groupings of the Pacific Islands into sub-regions of Micronesia, Polynesia and Melanesia are often applied as categories delineating ethnic, social, and cultural similarities and differences between Pacific Island countries and peoples. These divisions are part of the empire, originally based on distinguishing types of Pacific islanders and their societies for anthropological analyses. These divisions also were used for administrative purposes and are still used today for organizing, by government and non-government organizations, aid donors, UN and development agencies and other groups, including religious organizations. The divisions of countries and peoples into Micronesia, Polynesia and Melanesia are entrenched and have certain usefulness, in allowing groups to find common ground, organize and commit to acting together based on similar conditions, social structures and/or related political positions. However, these divisions are not used in this chapter in reference to the Pacific Island region.

Micronesia, Melanesia and Polynesia collectively belong to the political grouping of "the Pacific Island states." Australia and New Zealand are included in the Pacific region for their location, but for most intents and purposes, are clearly with distinct power, interests and political status unequal in comparison to the independent small island states of the Pacific. Australia and New Zealand, while not always presenting a similar front, are united in their military alliance with the United States, and recently unequivocally presented their united security, defense and military interests regarding the Pacific Island states, against their fears of China's growing influence with Island states.

In this chapter, we refer to the Pacific Ocean where the majority of the Pacific Islanders reside and their countries as the Pacific region. For reviewing actions Pacific Island states can take to protect Pacific resources and peoples, we are specifically referring to Pacific Island countries *with independent political status*, which can act collectively and nationally on behalf of their peoples. The collectivity of Pacific Island countries include independent, self-governing, non-self-governing associative islands and colonized countries. The following 12 countries have full membership status in the United Nations: Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu. In historical use, knowledge, traditional folklore, the Pacific Ocean has no boundaries for islanders, but is a connecting resource and part of their livelihood, life, and spirituality.

American Samoa, Northern Marianas and Guam are under United States control; the latter is a military base. Tokelau is under New Zealand control, as is the semi-dependent countries of Cook Islands and Niue. Wallis and Futuna, New Caledonia, French Polynesia, are colonies of France. Papua New Guinea has the largest Pacific Island population. On nuclear tests and militarization, French Polynesia was the area of French nuclear tests for 30 years. The Marshall Islands, to the north Pacific, is the site of United States' nuclear tests in the 1950s when it was part of its Trust Territory, a wider territory that included present-day Palau, Federated States of Micronesia and Marianas Islands, in a UN mandated territory

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under US control. The Pacific Island Forum (PIF) is the key regional institution for policy making for the independent Pacific Island states. It has other members and partners that participate in the PIF in different capacities. However, Australia and New Zealand, as key donors, often refer to the Pacific Island region and states as "our back yard."¹ They can assert assumptive "leading" rights in the islands, based on their dominant economic, trade and aid relationships with the Forum and most Pacific Island states. The ANZUS military alliance is a key feature of their security and defense interests, allied with the United States in the Pacific Ocean and including Island countries.

Nuclear Testing

The worst form of militarization of the Pacific region which has had long lasting, damaging effects on peoples' lives, health and the environment across the region, was its use by the United States, United Kingdom, and France, with the collaboration of Australia and New Zealand, in testing nuclear weapons. After the first atomic bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in Japan in 1945, the Marshall Islands was used for the United States' tests of atomic and hydrogen bombs, from 1946 to 1958. The Atomic Energy Commission conducted 67 atmospheric tests. The first hydrogen bomb was exploded in 1952. Impacts on Pacific lives were immediate and long term, existing until today. Marshallese inhabitants were relocated to other islands with the false information that they would eventually return home. In Micronesia, people on surrounding islands were also affected by the tests. In 1954, the notorious Bravo atmospheric test resulted in nuclear fallout scattering over a wider area than expected, including the inhabited islands of Rongelap and Utirik. Marshallese men, women and children experienced direct radioactive fallout. In terms of the environment, atolls were vaporized and became uninhabitable forever, due to levels of radioactivity on test sites; food sources were contaminated. Health impacts included deaths from radioactive burns, cancers and birth defects; health impacts from nuclear tests continue even today and to future generations. This applies to the tests in French Polynesia (see below), and in Kiritimati (Kiribati) and in Australia (tests impacting on service personnel and indigenous peoples).

Genetic and reproductive impacts were immediately experienced. Women reported giving birth to "jelly fish" babies; forms of life not recognizable as human. Marshallese were often transported to the United States for tests, examined, kept under observation then returned to the islands, with little or no medical treatment offered. Marshallese believe they were used as guinea pigs so the United States could study the impacts of radiation on humans; evidence in documentary film footage shows the Atomic Energy Commission was doing this—as victims were examined clinically but returned home untreated. Today, Runit dome on Enewetak Atoll, Marshall Islands, contains radioactive materials left behind by the United States. The dome is a major concern for Marshall Islanders, including the next generation, who are vocal on its risks of cracking and releasing radioactivity into the sea and food chain. The United Kingdom conducted

nuclear tests on Kiritimati Island and Malden Island, part of its colony of Gilbert and Ellis Islands, now the independent states of Kiribati and Tuvalu. The UK tests at Kiritimati Island affected Fijian and British servicemen present; many suffered and died from cancers, and their children have also experienced cancers (Ruff 2016; Maclellan 2017).

France conducted nuclear tests from 1966 to 1996 in Maohi Nui (French Polynesia). It is still a colony of France. Its economy, people, culture, population, composition and government, have been completely affected by the nuclear test program. A total of 193 tests were conducted on Mururoa and Fangataufa Atolls for 30 years. This included atmospheric and underground tests. Tahitians protested the use of their lands and atolls for nuclear tests; France denied any risks from its testing program. Tahitian leaders were denied full information on the tests and also threatened with military takeover by President de Gaulle unless the nuclear tests were accepted. Pouvanaa a Oopa, a much revered Tahitian independence and anti-nuclear leader, protested France's decision but was jailed and sent to France for many years of exile. The churches, particularly the Maohi Protestant Church, led a strong peoples' opposition to the nuclear tests, participated in by Maohi communities and leaders, test site workers, trade unions, and party leaders. The test site atolls of Bikini and Fangataufa remain under French military control and are contaminated and the test shafts threaten to collapse. Moahi Nui activists are concerned about the damage the resulting tsunami of radioactive material will cause across the Pacific Ocean and to their islands. Across the Pacific, an anti-nuclear protest and resistance movement has been formed that spanned 30 years.

The Pacific-Wide Nuclear Free and Independent Pacific Movements

Unlike in the period of the US tests in Marshall Islands in the mid-1940s to late 1950s, there was greater publicity and information available on the effects of the French nuclear tests in Mururoa which began in 1966. For the rest of the Pacific Islands, some still dependent states, the nuclear tests were an outrage to Pacific peoples. Scientists in the new University of the South Pacific shared information on radioactivity and its human consequences. Pacific Island countries were united in protesting French nuclear tests, joined by people and movements in Australia and New Zealand and beyond.

A regional meeting in 1975 organized by ATOM (Against Testing on Mururoa), church groups (Pacific Conference of Churches) and women's organizations (Fiji YWCA, National Councils of Women), brought together activists and organizations from across the Pacific Islands, including from Micronesia, the site of the United States' tests decades earlier. A Pacific-wide collaboration of peace, environmental, independence, indigenous, women's and anti-nuclear movements later grew out of this meeting. It led to the formation of the Pacific Peoples' Action Front and later the Pacific Concerns Resource Centre which served for many years as the hub for acts of resistance, advocacy, information sharing, lobbying and representation of the Pacific Island region in CSO, NGO and governmental gatherings, on issues of militarization, nuclear testing, missile testing and use of the Pacific Island region for the security interests of external states.

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In opposition to the French nuclear tests, a unique Pacific Islander solidarity was formed across the region, on upholding the humanitarian, health and human rights of Pacific peoples. France did not cease its tests for 30 years. Nuclear racism is a word used by the late Roland Oldham, President of the Maohi Nui victims' assistance group, Mururoa e Tatou, to describe an element of the Pacific nuclear test history.² Many Pacific Islanders, including newly independent states' national leaders, spoke strongly against the use of the Pacific Islands at global level. The Pacific Island Nuclear Free and Independent Pacific (NFIP) movement was unable to stop French nuclear testing which continued with impunity until 1996. However, states' and peoples' memories and solidarity with Pacific nuclear test victims of Marshall Islands' Moahi Nui and Kiritamati tests, continue. This was and is evident in the Pacific Island states strong commitment to the campaign to abolish nuclear weapons and the humanitarian initiative which gained international support leading up to the historic adoption of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) on July 7, 2017.

The Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons

The Pacific nuclear test history has resurfaced in the Pacific states' support for the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN), Nobel Peace Laureate 2017 and other states that led a drive to re-orient the view of nuclear weapons, from a defense and security issue, to one of humanitarian impacts. In this, Pacific Island states needed no introduction, to the many impacts of nuclear weapons, which they experienced through nuclear testing. The ICAN consisting of hundreds of partner organizations and working with states, achieved a treaty banning nuclear weapons. In the UN General Assembly, on July 7, 2017, 122 states voted for the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW); nine were Pacific Island states (Naidu 1988). Efforts are now focused on bringing the Treaty into force, which requires 50 ratifications; currently (October 2019) there are 32 ratifications, and 79 signatories; 5 Pacific region states have ratified (New Zealand, Palau, Samoa, Vanuatu and Kiribati) and six Pacific Islands states signed the TPNW.

The nuclear tests produced one of the greatest resistance movements the Pacific Island region has seen—the NFIP movement. There is less information or action by non-governmental organizations now, across the region, on nuclear issues and no concerted people's movements on militarization of the Pacific Islands, at the level that existed in the past, which included awareness of military bases, missiles testing, and security issues applied to the Pacific region. This gap of information, awareness and alertness need to be overcome as the intergenerational effect of radiation sicknesses, evident in both places of nuclear tests lingers on in Marshall Islands, Kiritimati, and Moahi Nui (French Polynesia).

Land: Alienation and Dispossession

Remnants of imperial laws in selected post-colonial Pacific states continue to be used by Pacific governments to the disadvantage of their own citizens. Colonial and neo-liberal perceptions of land as a commodity with economic value (exchange

value) are currently being pushed by multilateral organizations and donors in the Pacific at the expense of local understandings of land as a provider of life. Individual ownership with "paper titles" as evidence of land ownership is promoted and supported by multilateral organizations and governments, ostensibly to meet the requirements of the neo-liberal economies. A consequence of private ownership of land being prioritized over communal, egalitarian customary ownership has been bloody crises in Bougainville, Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands. Fears of land loss by customary owners were also part of the first of four coups in Fiji and Samoa's debates on the likely consequences of its 2008 Land Titles Registration Act (LTRA) pushed by the Asian Development Bank (ADB).

Most Pacific societies practice communal ownership of land that ensures that all people have some rights to land on either their mother or father's side of the family. The right to make food gardens, collect building materials, plant fruit trees, cash crops and other livelihood activities were assured under customary tenure. Societies looked after each other and there was security and social safety networks for people through their local land tenure system, which ensured that no member of society was ever left landless. Individual or corporate ownership of land was promoted by the introduced land system. It verifies the land in question and the owner of it. A process to identify indigenous land owners and get them to sign papers purporting to give consent for land use or "legal" land transfer was instituted by colonial administrations throughout Oceania. In many instances, part of the new system of land tenure was the appointment of colonial-designated "trustees"—individuals identified to represent whole landowning groups—a move that contributed to numerous problems among customary owners over rights of sale or alienation occurring later in Pacific states.

In indigenous tenure, records were not written down but kept as oral history and recalled as cherished and treasured historical records, transferred only to members of the same landowning group. The imperial powers that colonized the Pacific Islands imposed a centralized administrative record, keeping of all land and establishing institutions to keep land records, that were divorced from the people's social, cultural, group relationships with land. In Fiji, under the British colonial rule, Sir Author Gordon established the Native Land Trust Board (NLTB) that identified Fijian land owning groups (*mataqali*) and recorded them in a central recording office. This was next linked to establishing a birth register on all Fijians, to ensure continuity of the land records of members of the land owning group or in some cases, the non-continuation of a land owning group, whereby land reverted to the crown. The colonial state became the custodian of indigenous peoples' records and made decisions on their behalf in relation to land development. In Fiji, after a laborious effort at registering land, the British chose a unitary model of *mataqali* (group ownership) and applied it across the Fiji islands. Plantation agriculture (mainly for sugar production) was set up. With labor imported from Melanesia and later India, Fiji embarked on a colonial economy, creating ethnic and land use differences in status between Indian indentured laborers and customary land owners who were incorporated into the native land lease system set up by the colonial administration. This imperial approach

Table 18.1 Percent

Country

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Samoa
Solomon Islands
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Source: Ministries of Land

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Table 18.1 Percentage of customary and alienated land in five Pacific Island countries.

Country	Total land area (km ²)	Alienated land/ freehold (%)	Customary/native land (%)
Fiji	18,274	17.0	83.0
PNG	462,800	3.0	97.0
Samoa	2,842	14.7	85.3
Solomon Islands	28,400	19.7	80.3
Vanuatu	12,189	0.0	100.0

Source: Ministries of Lands and Town Planning Offices for respective countries above, 2018

resulted in the problems with land and ethnic relations in contemporary Fiji. Table 18.1 indicates the existence of the two land ownership systems in selected Pacific Island countries.

Although the percentage of land under freehold or leasehold (alienated) in these countries may appear to be small, alienated land usually represents the most fertile and resource rich areas in the countries concerned. Some of the conflicts in the Pacific over land are discussed below, to demonstrate the legacies of empire.

Land Crises: Bougainville, Papua New Guinea

Only 3 percent of land in PNG is alienated while 97 percent is under customary tenure. This means that most development projects in PNG are on customary land. The fundamental problem here is not land tenure but rather the expectations of investors using the modern land tenure and laws, which are often opposed to the worldview and values of customary landowners. The Bougainville conflict that claimed the lives of an estimated 10,000 to 20,000 people had its roots in the late 1960s when the Bougainville Copper mine was established (Allen 2018: 39). Over the years, Bougainvillians felt that they as landowners were not benefitting from the returns of the mine. The establishment of the mine and its associated problems, occurred when PNG was under colonial control and the land was leased for mining activity—a decision made by the then Australian administration—to an Australian-controlled multinational mining company.

Over the years, through the activities of mining in Bougainville, one of the largest open-cut mines in the world, the land and environment which the local people rely on for their subsistence livelihoods, was destroyed. In 1988, the landowners demanded for reparation from the mining company and the PNG government for damages and for a more equitable share of mining incomes. The PNG government and the mining company were unwilling to meet the demands of the landowning groups and population. A conflict lasting 10 years and closure of the mine, ensued. The current situation in Bougainville is a division of the island into leaders of the Autonomous Bougainville Government (ABG), landowners of the old Panguna mine who want it to reopen and those not from the mining area, in the Me'ekamu Government of Unity (MGU), who do not want the mine reopened

and if it is, they want all Bougainvilleans to benefit from it. The current question after this long history of the Bougainville crises, is on the fundamental appropriateness of the use of the title holders model (Allen 2018: 60). The history behind alienation and transfer of customary land for the Panguna mine, resulted in this severe dispute of a civil war, vulnerability, insecurity and armed conflict between indigenous landowners and peoples in the newly created Papua New Guinea independent state.

Solomon Islands

The first colonial regulations that facilitated the alienation of customary land in the Solomon Islands was the Queen's Regulation No. 4 of 1896. This regulation ensured that native landowners could transfer their customary land as either leasehold or freehold (Foukona 2007: 67). By 1900, Queen's Regulation No. 3 allowed the occupation of vacant land if a Certificate of Occupation was issued by the colonial administration (*ibid.*). The regulation declared all lands that were not occupied or vacant as waste land which would therefore be declared land that is owned by the Crown. The history of the disputes and tensions in the Solomon Islands can be traced back to the relocation of the capital town from Tulagi to Honiara on Guadalcanal after World War II, which used alienated lands in Honiara previously used for plantation development. It was these land ownership transfers since the colonial times until recently, that contributed to the inter-wantok tensions on Guadalcanal in 1998 that subsequently led to a total breakdown of law and order and an Australian peace keeping force taking over policing of Solomon Islands for decades, until police control was finally handed back to Solomon Islanders. Land and its transfer of ownership were behind this armed conflict, which caused a disruption of independent political life and sovereignty and caused loss of lives for Solomon Islands.

Vanuatu

The independence constitution of Vanuatu stipulated that all land in Vanuatu is customary. Under the condominium rule, huge areas of land were alienated and so the process of "nationalization" of land was the post independent government's preoccupation. Vanuatu's history of the push for independence shows that this policy was appealing because it promised the return of land to customary owners. These provisions were intended to put right the wrongs done to customary landowners that occurred in the colonial era, but this provision has not stopped continued alienation of land through lease arrangements (Haccius 2009). Land leasing and sub-leasing for longer periods of time for development activities have resulted in the marginalization and dispossession of Ni-Vanuatians from their customary land.

The alienation of land from customary owners to people from other islands and foreigners continues in Vanuatu. It is a worrying trend, particularly for the island of Efate where the capital Port Vila is situated. During the Land Conference in Vanuatu in 2004, Chairman of Vaturisu Council of Chiefs, Mr. Mormor, indicated

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that more than 70 percent of the land area on Efate is owned "by expatriates, naturalised citizens, or people from other islands in Vanuatu" (*Vanuatu Daily*, November 5 2004). Customary land is now also being converted into formal titles leased to international companies for very long periods of time, making land inaccessible to its original landowners. This is regarded as land grabs. Land grabs are developments of lands and conditions relating to their use, that make it difficult for customary owners to get their land back at the end of the leases. This is happening on the island of Efate, with the state encouraging tourism. Foreign investors leased large plots of land for hotel development have sometimes built hotels and resorts while others further subdivided the leased plots and subleased land to other interested parties, making fortunes in the process, with little going to original landowners. There is no protection of indigenous customary land rights by the state. Under Vanuatu law, at the end of the lease period, if the landowners wish to get their land back, they can do so, but must first also repay the cost of any land improvements (Stefanova 2008: 2). In Papua New Guinea, similar situations are occurring in leases of land facilitated by the state.

Pacific Island States Facilitating Land Grabs

In the Pacific Islands, new forms of legislation by independent Pacific states to release their own lands to foreigners for extraction or creation of wealth, encourages land grabs and marginalization of customary landowners. The economic system has not changed after independence and indigenous political leaders of the state are doing the same thing to customary landowners, that colonial administrations did in the period of empire in order to facilitate the functions of private enterprises. States in the Pacific are enacting "temporary release of land" measures, to allow business to extract, profit from and exploit land. After independence, citizens and customary landowners are still not receiving the economic benefits from their land resource as owners, but receiving rent from leases made by the state and under state control, often without customary owners participating in decision making.

In the Solomon Islands, the process of converting customary land into registered land is encouraged and promoted by successive governments since independence. The state can also compulsorily acquire land from customary land owning groups for development purposes. A good example of this is the current Tina River Hydro Project on Guadalcanal, where the state acquired land and registered the title in the landowning clans' names. The biggest threats for titled land in the Solomon Islands include the incomplete record of lease lands and the lack of any guarantee by the state of a safe return to customary owners when leases end.

In Samoa, there is a debate on the role of the Asian Development Bank's (ADB) push for land reforms and registration of land using the Torrens system. Due to the ADB's pressure to access government land and customary land for development, the Samoa government changed the law in 2008 to The Land Titles Registration Act (LTRA). Critics of the LTRA fear it will contribute to the further alienation of customary land. Iati Iati states, "all chiefly titles are attached to customary lands"

(Iati 2016: 67). Changes to customary land titles will also affect Samoan social relations and customary leadership.

The use of legal mechanisms to formally access and lease both customary and titled land for big businesses and companies is evident. What we now commonly refer to as land grabs in the Pacific Island countries is the situation where post-colonial states are allowing foreign and local enterprises access to possess and own customary land through the modern land tenure system. The unlawful acquisition of land through corrupt processes by post-colonial political leaders also alienates land from customary owners. Logging licenses and mining permits are issued without the free, informed prior consent of local people.

Reclaiming the Sacredness of Land for Pacific Islanders

The whole economic and political system is tied to one dominant view of the world of neo-liberal economics and politics. It promotes individualism and a minimalist state. Private property and individual ownership of land are part and parcel of this capitalist world order. In this new wave of imperialism, land grabs and dispossession of land and resources stem from laws and policies that are made by governments but pushed and funded by bilateral and multilateral organizations. How can nation states in the Pacific reclaim the sacredness of land in the face of this capitalist mode of globalization?

It is important that Pacific governments and peoples cease the privatization of customary lands undermining cultural values and equal access to resources for livelihoods. The peoples' relationship with land, especially customary land, and the associated community-based worldview need to be revitalized in the process of development. To this end balancing needs of the modern economy (not neo-liberal) and people's needs in a sustainable and equitable manner while redistributing resource revenues is necessary. There should be a recognition of landowning units as owners of land in perpetuity and all its members should also be shareholders in any business undertakings on their leased land. A good example is the Guadalcanal Plains Plantations Limited (GPPOL), where landowning clans (*mamata*) also own shares in the company.

Blue Colonialism: Industrialization of Ocean, the Final Frontier up for Grabs

Global powers including Pacific Island nations are in a race to divide up the last frontier of the world including the ocean's seafloors for exploitation of resources, using a narrative of Blue Economy or Blue Growth. Advancement in technology means that depths once considered unfeasible are increasingly accessible, allowing multinational corporations to plunder oceanic resources in a race to secure food security for countries external to the region and to provide them with alternative sources of minerals and energy. The Pacific Ocean, one of the last remaining healthy oceans, is set to be the new contested space for resources including fisheries and deep-sea minerals. Already Pacific Island governments, without the consent of their peoples, have issued commercial as well as exploration licenses

to significant minerals.³

The concept of a blue economy definition of the ocean's territorial waters and damage wrought include overfishing and climate change that the oceans' future is an outcome. We have a spiritual connection will see a return of transnational corporations must be resisted in habitation of this

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The oceans are the stability and its ability to global climate regulation and absorb 25 percent of the carbon circulation dynamics of the extraordinary biodiversity to the functioning of the ocean. Covering approximately 70 percent of the free water on earth and is home to the Pacific Ocean is illustrated into the Pacific basin.

The Pacific Island mixture of profound based on livelihood and traditional fishing and oceanic studies over institutions. They have However, their knowledge non-existent or just because of the rapid plunder of Islands and peoples.

New Plans for Turning

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to significant parts of their territories for experimental mining of deep-sea minerals.³

The concept of the Blue Economy has its origins in the broader green growth economy definition.⁴ Due to the capitalist dictates that have dominated exploitation of the oceans for decades, particularly in international but also national territorial waters, there is a growing concern and recognition now of the heavy damage wrought on ocean ecosystems, the blue heart of our planet. The damages include overfishing, habitat destruction, marine pollution, ocean acidification and climate change. Understanding the science behind the health and resilience that the oceans provide in order to sustain human activities now and into the future is an outstanding, urgent and compelling task. For the Pacific peoples who have a spiritual relationship with the ocean the industrialization of the ocean will see a return of the colonial powers and takeover of resources in new ways by transnational corporations and multilateral financial institutions. Such a move must be resisted not just for the benefit of the Pacific peoples, but for all of human habitation of this planet.

Significance of the Oceans

The oceans are the "blue heart" of the planet. Their importance to the planet's stability and its ability to sustain life is underscored by the oceans' contribution to global climate regulation. Oceans provide 50 percent of atmospheric oxygen and absorb 25 percent of human induced carbon dioxide emissions while its circulation dynamics of ocean currents make our planet habitable. Oceans are home to extraordinary biodiversity and unique ecosystems providing a global service to the functioning of our planet. The Pacific Ocean is the largest of all oceans. Covering approximately 59 million square miles and containing more than half of the free water on earth, the Pacific is by far the largest of the world's ocean basins and is home to the Pacific Island countries and its peoples.⁵ The vastness of the Pacific Ocean is illustrated by the fact that all of the world's continents could fit into the Pacific basin!

The Pacific Island science, mythology and understanding of the oceans is a mixture of profound inherited knowledge of sea currents, winds and marine life based on livelihood use, ancient history of oceanic currents through migrations and traditional fishing. The Pacific scientists have contributed to marine and oceanic studies over the past few decades based in Pacific regional and national institutions. They have also documented sea level rise and climate change. However, their knowledge of mineral resources in their own territorial waters are non-existent or just being done, and insufficient to keep up with the implications of the rapid plunder of the ocean which will have a destructive impact on Pacific Islands and peoples.

New Plans for Turning the Oceans into a Wasteland

The ability of humans to harness the power of the oceans is once again evolving in important ways. Ocean resources have been the foundation of global

trade and economic activities, a major source of food, energy and livelihood. Measuring the value of the ocean economy gives only part of an understanding of its significance. Updated figures from the European Union, estimates the value of new ocean industries at 5.4 million jobs and gross added value of €500 billion (European Commission undated). The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) suggests that the ocean economy is likely to outpace the global economy in the next 15 years. Clearly the oceans and their resources are a valuable commodity although some commentators caution that the true value of oceans is undervalued. Framed as perhaps the last untapped, under-explored and under-exploited region in the world, the Pacific Ocean is set to be a contested space. The contest for Oceania can be likened to the nineteenth-century "scramble for Africa." The economic gains Pacific states' leaders are courted with are a minute fraction of the value of the ocean resources that will be extracted. The case of Pacific fish stocks after years of licensing to allow uncontrollable commercial fishing extraction is a case in point.

The depletion of land based minerals and associated devastating impacts on ecology and communities caused by mining coupled with advancements in technology and consumer demand for electronic minerals and infrastructure (Hein et al. 2013), is set to make the ocean floor the next frontier for exploitation of minerals such as copper, lithium, rare earth minerals, cobalt, and manganese nodules.⁶ The exploitation of minerals on the sea floor by transnational corporations and governments in depths of around 400 to 6000 meters below sea level is set to take place in the Pacific Ocean, the Indian Ocean and the Clarion Clipperton Area. In total, the amount of area covered under the licenses is astonishing—covering over 1.3 million square kilometers of seabed. Deep sea mining is perceived as an imminent venture with countries like Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Tonga are seen as some of the first takers. Despite the experimental nature of the industry exploration has already begun within the territorial waters of these countries with PNG issuing the world's first commercial license set to start exploitation by 2019. Model legislation for Pacific Island countries funded by the European Commission signaled the readiness of the Pacific.⁷

Proponents supporting deep sea mining argue that ores on the sea floor are exceptionally rich and that deep sea mining takes place in smaller areas is considered more environmentally friendly than land based mining. They have long argued that nothing lives there, but the very opposite is true. This framing of low risk and high return ignores several pertinent realities. We do not know the full impact on the deep seabed and the waters. There is increasing evidence that deep sea mining poses a grave threat to the vital planet balance functions. Several studies have found that there would be immediate adverse impact on the ocean ecosystem health, species abundance and biodiversity (Dando and Juniper 2000). Most scientific studies also found that there will be little to zero recovery of biodiversity in the mined sites. More disturbing is that industrial scale operations (both in terms of size, intensity and duration) would have devastating and irreversible effects covering large areas of the ocean floor. In New Ireland and East New Britain in PNG people are already experiencing the negative impact of the

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exploratory mining and drilling occurring 30 to 50 kilometers from their communities. Villagers have reported an increase in frequency of dead fish washed up on shore, including a number of deep sea creatures hot to the touch as well as excessively dusty and murky waters. There is brutal irony here. In this era of global climate change, the Pacific peoples who have contributed the least to the causes of climate change and are acknowledged to be already bearing a disproportionate burden in terms of effect are also now facing an underwater attack of equivalent if not greater proportion.

Resistance to Desecration of the Sea

In the new era of oceans' exploitation, the Pacific Island states are in an uncharted territory. In that, if they do not have traditional wisdom and new information available to them in confronting and negotiating with the exploitative powers there will be irreversible consequences. Seabed mining is the crucial case challenging Pacific Island leaders and states. Will they make the right decisions involving the peoples? The prevailing position upheld by many Pacific thinkers and writers is that smallness in terms of land size has meant Pacific Island countries to be forever vulnerable. Lacking in agency and dependent on the former colonial powers and developed states or any country with technical resources or new and emerging development partners it is argued that the islanders have no other choice, but to be subservient for their survival. This conformist mentality betrays the deep relationship that the communities have with the ocean. In this age of climate change, we are forced to critically review our political positions, attitudes and actions that contribute to destruction of life and its continuity on the planet.

There are no more suitable people on this planet to be guardians of the world's oceans than those who call it home. Realizing this responsibility, in 2011, a collective which included feminists, community groups, regional non-governmental organizations and a faith based organization organized research and analyses to better understand implications of exploitation and desecration of deep sea minerals for the Pacific peoples and the ocean. In 2012, the collective mobilized over 8,000 signatures to caution Pacific Island Forum leaders over deep sea mining while in 2014 the Lutheran church issued a signed petition representing over a million of its members to the PNG government over growing concerns over impacts of deep sea mining.⁸ In Vanuatu, working closely with the Vanuatu Council of Churches and the Vanuatu Kaljoral Senta, the collective persuaded the government to review the 140 licenses issued without the prior knowledge of previous governments. Globally, activists from PNG and Fiji made an appeal in Europe in 2014 to garner support for a ban in seabed mining. It took 3 years of lobbying and advocacy by the European partners before the European Parliament supported a moratorium on deep sea mining (European Union 2012). Palau has placed a ban on commercial activities including fisheries and mining. Fiji's Director of Mineral Resources announced that Fiji will not be issuing any further new licenses for exploration of seabed minerals.

Conclusion: Reclaiming the Sacredness of Lives, Lands, and Seas

For ages the Pacific islanders have been living lives that uphold the sacredness of lives, land and seas. As ocean-going peoples who travelled far and over many routes at different times, to settle and populate the Pacific region they do not forget their rich community-based cultural heritage, the power of the ocean and the preciousness of land. Islands and ocean are part of their lives and worldview without which they have no existence. Egalitarianism and making sure no one is without land are features of customary land tenure that in the past, were in place to "ensure no one was homeless" and without means of living. This beautiful region where people cherished a communal life of sharing and closeness to land and sea has come under an immense onslaught since colonial times, which has been intensified, in our neo-colonial era. Their land and seas have been desecrated by nuclear testing, deep sea mining, privatization of land and commodification of their culture by the tourist industry forcing many of them to fight for their survival or conform to the dictates of the empire. Moreover, some are facing the threat of disappearance of their whole countries like Tuvalu and Kiribati under climate change. In the areas closer to nuclear test sites, particularly Marshall Islands, Maohi Nui (French Polynesia) and Kiribati, people continue to suffer from the destructive intergenerational, genetic, health, environmental, political and social impact. Yet, many continue to resist the onslaught with great resilience by maintaining a strong sense of place and obligation to protect their homeland and sea. They have been a formidable force that brought about the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. Networking among the islands in building a common Pacific identity that proclaims the sacredness of lives, lands and seas is a necessary step towards reclaiming the common good of the Pacific region and beyond. The cosmovision and coordinated actions of the islanders for the protection of land and sea are not only for their region, but also for the whole planet. The communities of islanders may appear to be small in number, but their resistance will have a global resonance in an age where both human beings and nature have been turned into exploitable objects by the empire.

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Notes

1. See recent statements by Australia and New Zealand's Foreign Ministers (September 2018) on new aid for the Pacific region to counter the growing concern about China's aid and security influence.
2. Speaking in New York, at the United Nations side event during the negotiations for a treaty banning nuclear weapons, which was adopted on July 7, 2017.
3. Almost all PICs with the exception of Samoa and Palau have issued exploration licenses to transnational corporations while Papua New Guinea is the first country in the world to have issued a commercial license.
4. Green Economy definition: Green economy is an economy that results in improved human wellbeing and social equity while significantly reducing environmental risks and ecological scarcities. While the Blue Economy (developing definition) as a sustainable ocean economy emerges when economic activities are in balance with the long term capacity of ocean ecosystems to support this activities and remain resilient and healthy.
5. There are 26 Pacific island countries of which 16 are sovereign states, while 8 are still territories including disputed colonial territories of France (New Caledonia, French Polynesia, Wallis and Futuna Islands), Indonesia (disputed—West Papua), USA (Guam, Hawaii, CNMI, American Samoa). Altogether, these countries represent a population of close to 20 million people.
6. The Copper Alliance argues that every mobile phone needs 0.02 kg of copper; for cobalt it is estimated that Volkswagen will need at least one third of the current entire global supply by 2025 for its energy efficient cars; geologists suggest that if all European cars are electric by 2040 (using Tesla Model 3), they would require 28 times more cobalt than is produced now (see Shukman 2018).
7. The SPC-EU Deep Sea Minerals Project has 15 Pacific Island Countries: The Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Timor Leste, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu (see Pacific ACP States 2011).
8. See updates on the role of Pacific peoples resistance in www.pang.org.fj.

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