

Book and Media Reviews

Five Takes on Climate and Cultural Change in Tuvalu

FEATURE REVIEW BY ANNE CHAMBERS AND
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The Disappearing of Tuvalu: Trouble in Paradise. 75 minutes, color, 2004. Director: Christopher Horner. Producer: Gilliane Le Gallic. A European Television Center production, in association with Planète & Planète Future. Distributor: Documentary Educational Resources <<http://www.der.org>> US\$59.95 (individuals), \$175.00 (institutions).

Paradise Drowned: Tuvalu, The Disappearing Nation. 47 minutes, color, 2001. Writer and producer: Wayne Tourell. Directors: Mike O'Connor, Savana Jones-Middleton, and Wayne Tourell, for New Zealand Natural History, Ltd. Distributor: Off The Fence. Information on ordering and price can be obtained from <<http://www.offthefence.com>>

Tuvalu: That Sinking Feeling. 16 minutes, color, 2005. Producer/Director: Elizabeth Pollock. Featured online on PBS Frontline/World/Rough Cut. Available for viewing at: <http://www.pbs.org/frontlineworld/rough/2005/12/tuvalu_that_sin_1.html>

Before the Flood. 59 minutes, color, 2005. Producer/Director: Paul Lindsay. Associate Producer: Lucy Bowden. Distributor: Stampede Limited <<http://www.stampede.co.uk>> US\$25.00

Time and Tide. 59 minutes, color, 2005. Directors: Julie Bayer and Josh Salzman. Executive Producer: Peter Gilbert. Distributor: Wavecrest

Films. Information on ordering and price can be obtained from <<http://www.wavecrestfilms.com>>

Tuvalu has come to epitomize the approaching environmental catastrophe of worldwide climate change and sea-level rise. This is a somewhat ironic fact, since its population of under twelve thousand is dwarfed by the millions of other people who also stand to be displaced from their homelands in the next century. Nonetheless, Tuvalu's iconic role as "poster child" for encroaching global disaster is well established by the five films reviewed here, all of which have been produced in the last five years. A steady stream of newspaper stories and magazine articles has also depicted the "sinking," "drowning," or "disappearing" of Tuvalu under "rising waters." (A slightly earlier film, *Rising Waters: Global Warming and the Fate of the Pacific Islands* [2000], focused particularly on Sāmoa, Kiribati, and the Marshall Islands, and was reviewed by John Hay in *The Contemporary Pacific* 14:291-293.)

Media attraction to Tuvalu as an appealing victim of global warming is understandable. Composed of nine atolls and reef islands, Tuvalu has a land area of just twenty-six square kilometers (the fourth smallest country in the world, about half the size of Manhattan Island) and a resident population of some 11,600 people. It is isolated, photogenic, culturally distinct, an independent nation since 1978, and a member of the United Nations since 2000. Tuvalu has also taken a leadership role in discussions of global climate change, seeking to

raise public awareness through speeches in the United Nations, leadership in regional organizations, and high-profile participation in global policy conferences. Tuvaluan leaders are demanding that the wider world acknowledge the fact of global climate change, accept responsibility for the rising sea levels and altered weather patterns that Tuvalu is experiencing, and do something about them.

If climate change trends continue, Tuvalu could become uninhabitable within the next half century, perhaps the first nation of environmental refugees. These five films all document that grim reality, providing compelling images of the local lifestyle, environmental changes, and individuals' responses, while raising important ethical and practical questions for viewers. They also all focus on urban Funafuti, Tuvalu's capital, where half the population now lives. This choice inevitably simplifies and masks some aspects of Tuvalu life because outer island communities still remain the real homeland for most Tuvaluans, and the essence of what will be lost should Tuvalu succumb to "rising waters." Each film uses a distinctive mix of techniques, sound, story line, and content to represent Tuvalu's situation. They share significant commonalities, yet ultimately tell very different stories.

*The Disappearing of Tuvalu:
Trouble in Paradise*

This French-American coproduction is the longest and most detailed of the films. Its opening scenes of rush-hour freeway traffic and suburban sprawl

in Southern California effectively link Tuvalu's "trouble," and its possible future disappearance, with lifestyles in larger industrialized countries. These connections are deepened when the British-accented narrator expresses feelings that many viewers can easily share: modern life involves a furious pace and an insatiable desire for more, as well as a disquieting sense that our consumption habits are unlikely to be sustainable in the long term. Accompanied by a montage of urban scenes, the narrator reveals that having just learned that Tuvalu obtains revenue from selling rights to its Internet domain, dot.tv, he now realizes that this place he had never heard of before "is about to be wiped off the map."

With this lead-in, the viewer is transported to Funafuti and given a brisk introduction to local life. Enele Sopoaga, ambassador to the United Nations, provides a fact-filled overview. Engaging scenes document the "coexistence of modernity and tradition" and the distinctive atoll environment: narrow ribbon of land, lagoon versus ocean sides, elevation of only a meter or two. We see the new paved road that has "changed the feel of the capital" (and, the filmmakers note, brought more vehicles and emissions). The scenes selected are ethnographically coherent and illustrate core features of local life. For example, the airfield's open space is accurately described as "the community's living room," and is shown thronged with people in the late afternoon.

The filmmakers lay a foundation that easily engages the sympathy of Western viewers. "I love Tuvalu. I want to live here all my life," declares

a local woman. A man who has worked in New Zealand testifies that even in Tuvalu's capital, life is not lived by the clock. We are told that in 1998 Tuvalu was declared the nation most respectful of human rights in the world. We learn that though Tuvaluans may be "poor" by international standards (per capita income is put at about US\$1,000), everyone enjoys relatively equal access to resources. Nonetheless, as in many developing countries, Tuvalu is actually experiencing rapid growth of a new economic elite, particularly in Funafuti, creating increasing economic disparities in a society where these were hitherto almost unknown. The film emphasizes that Tuvalu is "still safe" and doors can be left open. Indeed, the "guard" sitting near the open door of the prison compound turns out to be a prisoner serving time for assault. It is this "serene, improbably low-stress existence" that is threatened by rising sea levels.

A strength of this film is its detailed, holistic, and accurate overview of Tuvalu's urban lifestyle and its national economy. Carefully sequenced narration and pictures dichotomize the threat and bounty of the atoll's ocean setting, and depict both the structural importance of Christianity and the local emphasis on family and community. The film also sketches many local issues: rising energy demands that are largely met from nonrenewable resources, water shortages and groundwater contamination, the difficulty of policing territorial waters and enforcing fishing licensure treaties, and inorganic waste disposal problems. The borrow pits (dug by US forces in World War II to

provide airstrip material) that now exacerbate the capital's housing problem are shown, and an appeal is made for the United States to provide in-fill. Community elders describe how the rising water table sabotages traditional agricultural efforts. Tuvalu's political independence is contrasted with its economic limitations and the main income sources (philatelic [stamp-collecting] sales, international fishing zone licenses, seamen's wage remittances, and dot.tv revenues) are profiled. Aid dependency is also briefly discussed. Contemporary social life in the capital is evocatively captured in scenes of bingo, a kava-bowl singing group (a recent innovation), a nightclub, and various community events. The extent of media availability is explored, including the lack of broadcast television and the growing prevalence of video and DVD rentals. This detailed contextual development is important because it positions viewers, most of whom will have no previous knowledge of Tuvalu, to appreciate what is at stake for Tuvaluans and why continuing habitation of their traditional homeland is so important to them.

The final third of the film focuses specifically on the threat posed by global warming, which, viewers are warned, "is accelerating as you watch this film." A series of short vignettes documents the climate changes that are already occurring. Hilia Vavae, manager of the Tuvalu Meteorological Service and employed there since 1980, describes increased flooding during spring tides, showing photographs of herself and colleagues standing ankle deep in water outside their office. Marine Training School

Director Jonathan Gayton stands before the school's oldest building, explaining that it now regularly sits in water at high tide but was presumably sited on dry ground when built a hundred years ago. Retired sea captain Loto Pasifika tells of a large wave that washed over a part of Funafuti islet in August 2002, engulfing houses in half a meter of water. Some residents of the inundated houses also share their concern. While large waves have always pounded the reef in storms, people say, they normally stop short of the land. (Of course, the worst typhoons are an obvious exception. During Hurricane Bebe in 1972, several people drowned when a wave swept through Funafuti village.)

Recently, however, waves have surged over land without any associated storm. Hilia Vavae explains that the high-tide monitoring gauges installed ten years ago by Australia show a 4 millimeter average sea level rise per year, about 40 millimeters so far. Fili and Annie Homasi describe their solution: placing old car bodies along the lagoon side of their house to create a seawall to stop storm surges.

The reality that this film helps viewers to appreciate is that the people of Tuvalu are powerless to protect the way of life they value. It is hard not to be persuaded that the effects of climate change are already real and serious in Tuvalu, rather than simply a distant future threat. It is equally hard not to feel sympathy for Tuvalu's plight, and anger at the United States' refusal to ratify the Kyoto Protocol or to take seriously the effects of global climate change.

In the film's eloquent and understated conclusion, South Pacific

Applied Geoscience Commission (SOPAC) environmental advisor Sarah Hemstock urges Tuvalu to "keep its act clean" by minimizing use of fossil fuels, but acknowledges that real control lies elsewhere. Thoughtful comments by government leaders including Enele Sopoaga and Panapasi Nelesone raise the possibility of lawsuits should resettlement become necessary, noting that agreement has been reached for a few Tuvaluans to emigrate to New Zealand. It becomes clear that thoughtful Tuvaluans hold larger countries morally accountable. Viewers are asked "to see what is happening today," in the hope that the changes necessary to stave off this global disaster will follow.

The Disappearing of Tuvalu is an interview-based documentary. Well crafted, the film segues seamlessly from one speaker to the next, providing a rich array of supporting visual material. It is remarkable for its tight editing and the detailed information it provides about local life. Concise voiceover narration structures the first half of the film but gradually diminishes, leaving a wide range of English-speaking Tuvaluans to express the film's concluding message: that Tuvalu's "trouble" is actually an urgent global threat. The closing statement, printed over a striking violet/pink lagoon sunset, rolls out a compelling call to action.

Tuvaluans who speak in this film are articulate and often eloquent, notable for their self-possession and modesty. Presentation of their country's situation is neither strident nor angry, which will strike viewers as remarkable, considering the serious losses Tuvaluans face. The credits at

the end of the film acknowledge the local assistance the filmmakers received and poignantly pay tribute to Paul Alapati of Tuvalu's Computer Division, who died unexpectedly while the film was in production. Though lengthy, *The Disappearing of Tuvalu* easily holds viewers' attention. It is an informative case study, as relevant to classes on social and environmental issues as to Pacific-oriented courses, and should be of interest to nonacademic audiences as well.

*Paradise Drowned: Tuvalu,
The Disappearing Nation*

Constructed as a personal drama, *Paradise Drowned* was crafted for television audiences in 2001 by Natural History New Zealand, Ltd. The film does not appear to have been released until 2004, when it was broadcast in Australia (and perhaps other markets) and then shown in the United States in the National Geographic *Close Up* series in spring 2005. The story follows Meleta Falavii, a twenty-three-year-old student in her second year of studies at Otago University, Dunedin. Meleta returns home to celebrate the Christmas holidays with her family in Funafuti but her visit is shadowed by foreboding. She and her family fear that rising sea levels will soon make Tuvalu uninhabitable, and her parents are considering emigration. Already, four of Meleta's siblings have settled overseas, and her mother is determined that the family make a new home together in Brisbane, Australia. Her father is ambivalent and Meleta herself is committed by contract to work in Funafuti's hospital pharmacy for seven

years after graduation, as recompense for her government-funded university scholarship. The film's theme is captured in a question Meleta asks early on: "Can we stay, or will we be forced to leave our land?"

Meleta's experiences move the narrative forward. She is shown interacting with expatriate and local experts. For example, environmental adviser Ursula Kaly explains to her the geological processes of atoll development. Paani Laupepa from the Ministry of Natural Resources, Energy, and Environment points out an area near the airstrip that floods at high tide, where water bubbles out of the ground as the water table is pushed upward by tidal pressure. Meleta attends a holiday feast, visits the store to see the imported food on which people increasingly rely, swims with friends in the lagoon, weaves a head wreath, attends the swearing-in ceremony of the new prime minister, and watches the ocean waves pensively. Local scenes are relatively brief and superficial but give viewers some sense of contemporary life in Tuvalu.

Meleta herself offers an ongoing commentary that personalizes Tuvalu's environmental threat and seems intended to evoke viewer sympathy. For example, sitting on the ocean shore with her feet washed by waves, she muses about data just presented on sea level rise: "Average height above sea level is two meters. If the sea rises one meter, there won't be a lot of Tuvalu above the sea." Later, a shot of storm waves leads her to wonder, "How can we survive such an invasion?" And in response to information on increased hurricane frequency and intensity, she poses the

rhetorical question: "It is not a happy future, is it?" This narrative strategy seems increasingly artificial as the film progresses. Rather than an authentic window into a Tuvalu person's thoughts and feelings, Meleta's commentary appears to be a scripted dramatic device conveying the theme of impending loss. Learning from the credits that Meleta's commentary was read by someone else contributes to this sense of contrivance.

Another narrative strategy involves a storytelling session in which former Prime Minister Kamuta Latasi summarizes Tuvalu's history for children seated in a circle on the beach. His main theme, too, is survival: "We adapted to European ways, we survived. . . . But it appears that we may face the greatest enemy that we have ever found, the effects of climate change." (Kamuta's voice here is also that of an actor, the credits reveal.) The film returns awkwardly several times to this scripted historical condensation cast as a children's lesson, which ends by predicting lengthy debate over the Kyoto Protocol and the role of industrial pollutants in causing global warming.

Curiously, despite a plot structure that depends on accepting Tuvalu's plight as real, *Paradise Drowned* seriously entertains the possibility that sea level rise has not been adequately documented. Dr Vincent Grey, captioned as a "climate scientist" but given no institutional affiliation, explains that measuring increases in global average sea level is difficult and expresses doubt that reported rises have actually occurred or will continue. His doubts are immediately countered by Meleta ("The sea is

rising. The sea is not rising. What do we do, who are we to believe? We believe our eyes. Already there are signs"), and by local and outside authorities who all describe recent changes in weather patterns and sea level rise. But Grey's skepticism intrudes several more times as the film progresses, each point again countered by other experts. It is not clear whether Grey's dissenting voice is intended to add an element of dramatic tension to the film, or to provide "balance" to the central argument that Tuvalu is about to disappear.

Paradise Drowned makes effective use of satellite photos of Funafuti and Nukufetau to illustrate the dynamics of atoll development. There are dramatic images of strong winds, rough seas, and crashing waves. Meleta is presented as an attractive, forward-looking, and intelligent young woman, at home in the Western world, and yet undergoing personal conflict as the forces of globalization affect her island culture and threaten her home's very existence. She, her friends, and her family are people that Western viewers can easily empathize with and respect. A personalized drama such as this film may well be what is needed to bring home the reality of global climate change for some viewers. Others may find it overly constructed, even patronizing, although well intentioned.

Tuvalu: That Sinking Feeling

Filmed in 2003, this short feature was shown in December 2005 on the US Public Broadcasting Service network's Frontline/World series *Rough Cut* and

is available for viewing on the Internet. The initial product of a larger film project, *Atlantis Approaching* (50 minutes), which the director's Web site says is due for completion in 2006, this film is crafted as a first-person journalistic account, providing a brief but comprehensive overview of the climate changes already apparent in Tuvalu and local people's reactions to them. The US filmmaker herself is a visible presence throughout. We see her embark on the MV *Nivanga II* in Suva to make the three-day voyage to Tuvalu and then accompany her as she interacts with Tuvaluans who share their experiences, knowledge, and reactions. Each person is carefully named and introduced with subtitles.

Despite this film's brevity, Tuvalu's experience of rising groundwater levels, documented higher tides, salt-water incursion in agricultural plots, increased shoreline erosion, and the loss of Tepukavilivili islet is deftly presented and documented with visits to affected areas. Rare footage (shot by Funafuti video maker Iakopo Molotii) of the 8 August 2002 wave that washed across a narrow portion of Funafuti, inundating several houses and killing vegetation, is included. All of this effectively prepares the viewer to understand why Paani Laupepa wants the "precautionary principle" to guide global decision making about climate change. Laupepa urges industrial countries to work together to reduce emissions and live sustainably, admits his anger that Tuvaluans will be "forced to relocate by something that has nothing to do with us," but maintains the hope that there is still time to avert catastrophe.

The film's focus now shifts to

briefly consider migration to "places with higher ground" as a potential solution. New Zealand's agreement to allow Tuvalu seventy-five permanent residency slots annually is noted, but interviews make it clear that migration is an option that appeals only to some people, while others reject it outright. (Actually, migration to New Zealand via the Pacific Access Category involves meeting stringent requirements, including the ability to hold a conversation in English, health and character documentation, and proof of an offer of employment that will meet income requirements—as well as a certain amount of luck, since successful applicants are randomly selected via computer drawing to meet each country's annual quota.) The film ends with the recognition that "the entire world will be affected by global warming," not simply Tuvalu.

There is an authentic feel to this film. People go about daily tasks as they talk to the camera, revealing much about the crowded, third-world lifestyle in urban Funafuti. The filmmaker's visibility underscores the fact that the people interviewed are responding to her personally, even as they share their stories with a wider audience through her film. Its availability on the Internet and this film's straightforward style make it eminently useful for teaching. On the film's Web site, a compilation of related links provides a wealth of supporting information, and posted reactions from all over the world provide additional food for thought. Allowing free public access to this film and accompanying it with quality supporting documentation surely takes advocacy to a new height.

According to the filmmaker, the forthcoming hour-long version, *Atlantis Approaching*, will include additional coverage of local and scientific evidence for sea level change and will portray some Tuvaluans' efforts to migrate to New Zealand through the Pacific Access Category quota. Other aspects of social and cultural change in Tuvalu will be profiled, including dietary changes, increased vehicle imports, urban drift, resource limitation, the damaging effects of World War II borrow pits, and Tuvalu's internal modernization efforts. The film's conclusion is planned to be a "montage of images and ideas from scientists on things everyone can do to help slow carbon dioxide emissions." One can request to be notified of the completion of this film by leaving an e-mail address on the Web site, <<http://www.blue-marble.tv/>>.

Before the Flood

The main theme of this film is that Tuvaluans live just above sea level on islands that are soon to sink beneath the waves, destroying their way of life. The viewer is shown erosion on beaches, an islet stripped of sand and vegetation so that only a rough jumble of coral protrudes above the lagoon, gardens damaged by salt-water, breaking waves looming ominously high, Tuvaluans attesting to increases in cyclone frequency, downpours of rain, and many shots of bare feet in puddles. Assistant Secretary for Foreign Affairs Paani Laupepa's plea for compensation from industrialized nations for anticipated economic and cultural losses,

in accord with the "polluter pays" principle, is well supported. The film's message here is explicit: Tuvalu's existence is threatened and its people face an uncertain future. Indeed, viewers of all of these films cannot help but wonder how Tuvaluans are coping with such high levels of present and future insecurity.

The social aspects of Tuvalu's "big problem," a second focus of this film, are documented through portraits of a dozen local characters, structured as a series of montages. It gradually becomes apparent that the characters' situations, activities, and responses to the unseen interviewer/filmmaker's questions connect with a rhetorical question posed early on by the narrator: "How do you feel when you're about to lose the land beneath your feet?" Inevitably, most viewers will assume that these personal profiles have been selected to provide a representative overview of what Tuvaluans and local conditions are generally like. In actual fact, the profiles involve equivocal, complex, and sometimes conflicting images of local life, personal situation, and opinion, and they demand active interpretation by the viewer. The ambiguity that pervades this film also tends to distance the viewer intellectually and emotionally from the local situation, making it hard to feel much empathy for those portrayed. Little background information is provided about Tuvalu or processes of global climate change, and scenes often shift quickly from place to place, from person to person, without obvious thematic coherence or narrative thread.

To interpret this "open text" film, viewers must draw from the feelings

that images and conversations evoke, without much support from formally presented information. The impressionistic interpretation process hinges on two implicit assumptions that are probably accepted by most viewers: that documentary images are relatively "real" (though not necessarily the "whole truth") and that the events shown illustrate key dimensions of local reality (though not its full complexity). Viewers also assume that filmmakers choose editing techniques and word/image juxtapositions that most effectively communicate what they understand to be real and true.

With these considerations in mind, some content choices in this film raised questions for us. For example, the local hotel manager, one of the main characters, seems easily stereotyped by Western viewers. Why was he featured so prominently in the film when the portrayal appears to undermine him? Aggressive interview techniques lead several speakers to reveal subtly stigmatizing information that could have been edited out. What viewer conclusions are these intended to support? We also wondered at the camera's preoccupation with bare feet, and why a European expatriate who is married to a local woman was given such a key role in articulating Tuvaluan experience and concerns. A fairly lengthy segment on Kioa Island in Fiji, purchased by the British government for the Vaitupu community in the 1940s and today home to several hundred Tuvaluans from the island of Vaitupu, is also puzzling. The island seems to be profiled as a potential future resettlement site for Tuvaluans generally, but this is never clarified. In actuality, Kioa is part of

Fiji and Vaitupuan moving there recently have not found it easy to gain legal residency. The film's soundtrack also feels overproduced, with bird sounds overlaid on scenes of the Tuvalu bush (which has no songbirds). Dramatic orchestral music accompanies storm scenes, and archaic chant music (recorded in 1960 on the outer island of Niutao but seldom sung or heard today) plays repeatedly, perhaps intended to add tension.

In contrast to the other films reviewed here, *Before the Flood* does not evoke much empathy for Tuvalu's plight; instead, subtle but pervasive resonances connect easily with Western stereotypes about primitive "others." Nor does it take an activist stance regarding global climate change. With migration strategies such a dominant theme and many enterprising Tuvaluans shown as already poised to leave, viewers may see relocating Tuvalu's small population to a larger host country as the only logical solution to the problem of rising waters. If there is little that seems appealing or even worth saving about local life, it becomes easy to conclude that Tuvaluans should simply be moved elsewhere, even though some of those interviewed specifically reject this as a solution. The cultural reality that this film constructs has intimations of tragedy: People must leave in order to prosper, dreams are sabotaged by chronic illness and human limitations, trash is invading paradise, and entrepreneurial success is fragile. Though viewers may develop some sympathy for individual characters, and will probably see Tuvalu as a place of great beauty and

serious social problems, they are also likely to conclude that Tuvalu has no future and that global climate change is unstoppable.

Such a conclusion discounts the loss in cultural integrity that uprooted Tuvaluans will face, absolves Western viewers from responsibility for global warming, and encourages judgmental responses about local life. Viewers who lack specific knowledge of Tuvalu will probably need help to recognize the stereotypes lying just below the surface of this film. A teaching guide, though only a partial solution, could raise useful questions about the implicit meanings conveyed.

Time and Tide

In 2002, a group of some sixty Tuvaluans who had been long resident in New Zealand returned for a two-month visit to their home island, Funafuti. This film tells their story and the current situation in Tuvalu as they experienced it. Told entirely in the voices of Tuvaluans themselves, without any voiceover narration, the film follows this malaga (a customary Tuvaluan group visit from one island to another) from its start in Suva through the conclusion of the visit. Led by Manoa Manoa, a soft-spoken man in his sixties, the group is made up of three generations: grandparents who want to show their families the world they left behind two decades ago, knowing that this may be their last trip to Tuvalu; a middle group of adults who have some memory of Tuvalu but have spent their working lives in New Zealand; and teenagers and children who have only heard about their distant homeland. The

film captures the excitement and trepidation the group feels—teenagers speaking impeccable New Zealand English worry aloud about not finding hot showers and clean toilets, adults in their thirties explain that they are funding the trip to show the kids what Tuvalu is like and to fulfill their parents' dream of returning home, while older adults speak wistfully of identity and cultural roots. As one elder puts it, "Tuvalu is my heart. Deep in my heart, my island is always there."

As the ship leaves Fiji we see sleeping mats covering the ship's deck, the area packed with colorful bedding, luggage, and reclining passengers, all accurately depicting the tone of inter-island travel. Coming ashore at Funafuti, there are tears as elders are met, young ones exclaimed over, and jokes made about how people have changed. Much of the dialogue is in Tuvaluan, translated unobtrusively in subtitles, and the film moves easily into English and back to Tuvaluan, reflecting generational differences and the capital's own linguistic reality. The group settles into its visit and a series of activities unfold. There is a welcoming line of elders, a community feast, and dance performances in which the newcomers are pitted against Funafuti residents. The visitors explore Funafuti by bus and on foot, scenes interspersed with interviews that are smoothly edited, never obtrusive, with people simply speaking for themselves.

The key themes in the film soon become apparent. Change is everywhere. This appalls some of the returnees. Their shock at finding that the island's nicest picnic area is now

used as a rubbish dump is portrayed in their faces and in words, a mixture of disgust and sadness. Funafuti chief Siasi Finiki comments that change is inevitable, a global phenomenon; Tuvalu is simply caught up in a worldwide pattern. But the changes that have overtaken Tuvalu's capital are too much for some in the malaga. Sally, thirtyish daughter of one of the elders, leaves prematurely for New Zealand, unhappy with what she has found. Her mother, she says, had hoped to rebuild the family home, but not now: "No way." The leaders meet to discuss the tension between idealized expectations and the reality of life in a crowded urban center. Teenagers in the group comment candidly on the difficulty of being outsiders where they expected to fit in. Hair conditioner is not available in the stores, and they sometimes forget to cover their New Zealand jeans with a wraparound lava-lava, as modesty demands. Their relatives and friends here, they note, would be called "freshies" in New Zealand, short for "fresh off the boat," a derogatory label for recently arrived Pacific Islanders. The clash of modernities is evident and portrayed sensitively.

Another theme is that of "going home." The group goes by motorboat to the islet of Funafala, some miles down the Funafuti lagoon and a generation or more distant from life in the capital. Life here is closer to the "traditional" pattern than anywhere else in Funafuti: a thatched meeting house, piglets foraging, pure sandy beaches, no cars or trucks, a few older residents who speak eloquently of a peaceful life away from the urban bustle. Manoa, leading the

visitors, says that when he is able, he will return to live here at Funafala, suggesting that some accommodation might be possible with forces of change.

But others in the group are focused on something else: the changes that global warming and sea level rise are precipitating in Tuvalu. The tip of the islet where Funafala's village once stood is now just a low sandbank, underwater. The camera pans across a dazzling white beach fringed with palms. Eric Chivian, a climate change specialist at Harvard University, explains that effects like these in Tuvalu are the result of "profligate use of fossilized fuels by the industrialized North." Paani Laupepa, spokesperson for the Ministry of Natural Resources, suggests that Tuvalu is a victim of ecoterrorism: "We are the front line of what's being caused by industrialized nations. Security is not defined simply by terrorism—it is defined by the probable displacement of people from their homeland." Iopu, a Funafuti resident related to some of the malaga visitors, contrasts the older generation's faith (that God will never again subject humanity to a flood such as Noah suffered) to the younger generation's acceptance of scientific support for sea level rise. Compelling video footage, shot by a local resident in May 2002, shows freak waves flooding over the land in part of Funafuti, entering houses, and inundating planted areas.

This film moves at an easy pace, allowing images and sounds to fill in after interviews, giving the viewer enough time to reflect and ponder the meanings of what has been shown. It captures the unhurried pace of Tuva-

luan life, letting the characters speak for themselves, using natural sounds and scenes in whole sequences to convey the actual quality of life in Tuvalu today. Written information, presented on screen from time to time, makes voiceover narration unnecessary.

In the end, the malaga members depart for home. They are, as the cliché goes, sadder but wiser. Going back in time is impossible: inevitably, things change. The idyllic Tuvalu of the elders' memories is, like many other nostalgic pasts, not recapturable. Nonetheless, for all Tuvaluans, global warming and sea level rise are real threats to survival as a society. This fragile group of central Pacific atolls, already engulfed by change, is likely to be literally engulfed by seawater before too long.

The science of global climate change is the persuasive subtext in all the films. This review is not the place to lay out details of that discussion, beyond acknowledging the increasingly incontrovertible evidence that emissions and other products of the industrial world are altering the world's climate patterns, creating rising temperatures and sea levels. The risk to all the earth's inhabitants is sufficient to require immediate action. It seems apparent to us that the few remaining global-warming skeptics are soon likely to be proven wrong, and that front-line nations such as Tuvalu (and other small island states and low-lying nations) have it right. People who have successfully inhabited sand spits only a few meters above sea level for some two thousand years surely know when something is amiss.

These films thus offer a powerful and timely message, one that should be heard by viewers in industrialized societies especially. Just as Tuvalu's situation and media attention have made it the exemplar of the fate that awaits all of the world's low-lying areas, Tuvalu, in turn, has taken an activist role to become an effective voice for less powerful nations. For example, Tuvalu's UN ambassador, Enele Sopoaga (interviewed at length in two of these films), speaks out frequently on climate change issues. At the 11th Annual United Nations Conference on Climate Change in Montreal in December 2005, where he also served as spokesperson for the Alliance of Small Island States, Sopoaga worked with others to get the Mauritius Strategy included on the agenda. This thirty-page action plan (http://www.un.org/smallislands2005/pdf/sids_strategy.pdf) to help small island nations cope with climate change was blocked from discussion in Montreal by the United States, which has also repeatedly rejected the Kyoto Protocol and, with Australia, has contested scientific evidence of global climate change. Tuvalu also played a major role in the Barbados and Kyoto meetings on climate change, and was a key participant in the 2005 United Nations Conference on Small Island States in Mauritius. Films such as these support efforts by Tuvalu and other nations to mobilize global action to stem this grave environmental threat.

While the smaller Pacific Island states may be among the first to suffer as sea levels rise, all of the world's coastal places will be inundated eventually. As climate patterns shift,

life for everyone will be affected and new adaptations will ultimately be required. Humanity clearly faces a critical juncture. As the first film reviewed here eloquently concludes, "We are ALL Tuvalu."

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Southern Oregon University

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The Land Has Eyes: Pear ta ma 'on maf, 87 minutes, DVD/35mm, color, 2005. Writer and director: Vilsoni Hereniko; producers: Jeanette Paulson Hereniko, Corey Tong, Vilsoni Hereniko; executive producer: Merata Mita; distributors: Te Maka Productions (world, except Australia) and Ronin Films (Oceania); languages: Rotuman with English subtitles; Te Maka Productions, Pacific Islanders in Communications in association with Ora Digital. Information on price and ordering is available at <<http://www.thelandhaseyes.com>>.

The phrase "Pear ta ma 'on maf" is taken from an ancient Rotuman proverb that translates as "The land has eyes and teeth and knows the truth," and extols the virtues and reliability of justice, indigenous style. This belief is ultimately based on a holistic relationship with the land as provider and caregiver of its human dependents. It is a belief central to Vilsoni Hereniko's feature film, *The Land Has Eyes*, shaping the thoughts and actions of Viki, a Rotuman schoolgirl (played by newcomer Sapeta Taito), its main character and the film's centrifugal force.

Indeed, Viki and the land are intimately connected, as her eyes come to

represent the land's eyes and symbolize an ancient watching, one that the land supernaturally follows through with action. Viewers follow Viki's life as she embraces the stories of Rotuma's past told by her father, who quietly resists colonial religion and its other ideological influences. Clearly she is her father's daughter, rather than her conformist mother's. This underlying tension between traditional and Western influences is emphasized when the central crisis of the film arises: her father is falsely accused (and convicted) of stealing by his greedy and corrupt neighbor. Viki then acts to clear the name of her beloved father and restore her family's reputation.

She represents the new generation of Pacific Islander who is able to bridge two often conflicting worlds: one represented by traditional island-based wisdoms and ways of doing things (she would rather listen to her father's stories of Rotuma than attend what she views as a hypocritical church); and the other represented by the Western world of knowledge (as a student she is contending for a scholarship and, with her father's support—also demonstrating an ongoing negotiation with the West—fervently pursues the individualistic pursuits of higher education). The inner strength and resolution she needs to fight corrupt Rotuman officials and face paternalistic colonial authorities is "unearthed" from Rotuma's principal myth, passed on to her by her father. The story of Tafate'amasian (played by Rena Owen) is one of a wronged woman who found the courage and fortitude within herself and in her relationship with the land to become Rotuma's warrior woman and found-