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How Pacifika Arts Reveal Interconnected Losses for People and Place in a Changing Climate

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Abstract: The loss and damage transpiring because of anthropogenic climate change is a confronting reality, especially for frontline communities of the Pacific Islands. Understandings and assessments of loss and damage often fall short on coverage of intangible and noneconomic dimensions, such as losses to culture, place, Indigenous knowledge, and biodiversity, among others. In responding to this knowledge deficit, this paper turns its attention to the burgeoning Pacifika arts community because creative and cultural expressions have been critical avenues for sharing experiences, navigating loss, and exploring grief throughout history, including in the context of climate-driven loss. We analyse a series of Pacifika spoken, written, and visual items ($n = 44$), including visual art, poetry, song, film, documentary, and theatre, to identify the key categories and themes of noneconomic loss and damage (NELD) that emerge, better understand their nature, indicate their levels of prominence, reflect on them in relation to existing NELD frameworks and categories, and identify strategies for processing and coping. Our findings add to existing understandings of losses to territory, cultural heritage, human mobility, and health while also putting forward identity and agency as additional prominent NELD types. We emphasise that loss occurs within an interconnected and complex system that is centred on the critical relationships between people and their land, and greater attention must be paid to this interconnectivity as the foundation of identity and wellbeing. These perspectives enable stakeholders to better integrate experiences of NELD into future planning efforts so that they are not skewed (i.e., considering only economic loss and damage) or discounting people's experiences. This will be critical for holistically building greater resilience and for communication in international fora and climate negotiations.

Keywords: agency; arts; climate change; healing; identity; noneconomic loss and damage; Pacific Islands



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1. Introduction

Loss refers to the irreversible and negative impacts that occur despite mitigation and adaptation efforts [1–3]. The 1.5 °C and 2 °C global warming scenarios indicate that climate hazards will continue to increase and occasion greater, accelerated losses in the coming years [4]. To respond to this trajectory, working through loss has been identified as an essential prerequisite in achieving successful climate change adaptation [5,6]. Randall finds that when “loss remains unspoken, neither grieved nor worked through, then change and adjustment cannot follow” [7], p. 119. According to this perspective, the state of knowledge about climate change-driven loss needs to be expanded, as any denial of loss would be naïve [8]. The failure to address climate-change-driven loss can “trap populations in a state of vulnerability, inviting a downward spiral of impacts and further losses” [9], p. 15.

Existing knowledge on, and discussions about, climate-change-driven loss and damage also tend to be skewed towards those that can be easily measured in economic terms. While this type of loss and damage is gaining recognition in international fora (such as the

UNFCCC process), the lack of a market price and unit of measure has caused noneconomic loss and damage (NELD) to be under-represented in the literature and the experiences of pain, suffering, and grief to often be overlooked [10]. In response to this, researchers are continuing to delve into the complex noneconomic aspects of loss to uncover the full extent of how it affects people. This is not to say, however, that experiences of NELD have not been acknowledged, shared, and worked through in other spaces. In fact, creative and cultural expressions provide critical avenues for sharing experiences, navigating loss, and exploring grief without trying to quantify or simplify them into any homogenous ideal (Hoffmaister and Stabinsky, 2012; Pill, 2020; Rathwell and Armitage, 2016; Hawkins, 2015). Pacific art specifically presents a unique perspective of cultural practices that often encompass storylines, emotional expressions, and learnings throughout history, including experiences of climate-change-driven loss [11]. This is a rich source of knowledge and experience that is critical to draw on to understand NELD but also to amplify the voices of Pacific Islanders around NELD.

Given this context, this paper examines a range of creative and cultural works from the Pacific Islands region and documents the existing and anticipated NELD that are being communicated and worked through. The objectives of this study are to identify the key categories and themes of NELD that emerge through these works, understand their nature, indicate their level of prominence, and reflect on them in relation to existing NELD frameworks and categories. Relatedly, the paper aims to identify the cultural responses to and strategies for processing and coping with losses. The findings offer insights into the kinds of processes that support processing and transformation while offering comfort, hope, and motivation to act, from the individual scale to the international scale.

We focus on the Pacific Islands because of their physical vulnerability to climate risks (e.g., sea-level rise, prolonged drought, cyclones, and saltwater intrusion), which makes their exposure to loss greater than most [3,9,12]. Improving our understanding about how people experience and work through NELD is critical not only for building greater resilience and better informing policy and decision-making but also for inspiring hope and encouraging future action within the spaces that people value most [7].

2. Summarising the Literature

At a global scale, the UNFCCC [13] technical paper outlined eight core noneconomic loss types or categories in what is often considered to be a comprehensive list: loss of life, human health, human mobility, territory, cultural heritage, Indigenous knowledge, biodiversity, and ecosystem services. Through a systematic literature review and a survey of expert stakeholders, McNamara et al. [14,15] have also outlined the most prominently documented, experienced, and anticipated NELD for the Pacific Islands region. Human mobility and territory were identified as the most prominent NELD themes from the literature review, followed by cultural heritage and Indigenous knowledge, life and health, biodiversity and ecosystem services, and a sense of place and social cohesion [14]. Comparatively, a survey of expert stakeholders in the Pacific Islands region revealed the interconnectedness in NELD categories and the importance of identity, intangible values, and cultural landscapes [15]. These kinds of discussions around NELD, but also loss and damage more generally, support calls for climate justice and liability in climate negotiations [16,17]. Below, we draw on some of the work to date, including from the Pacific, in these key NELD areas. We attempt to build on and unpack these findings by leveraging the insights from creative geographies and their diverse creative and cultural expressions.

Loss of life and damage to life (i.e., life expectancy) are due to a range of natural hazards, including cyclones, landslides, typhoons, and drought in the Pacific [13,18,19]. Relatedly, health is a key area of NELD, which can be affected through direct (e.g., physical extreme weather events), indirect (waterborne disease, vector-borne disease, respiratory illness), and delayed (e.g., mental health, noncommunicable disease) pathways [20,21]. Impacts on health can be physical and/or mental [20,21]. Climate-change-driven ecosystem degradation can threaten physical health through food and water insecurity and through

poor nutrition in the Pacific [21,22]. Instances of deteriorating spiritual wellbeing, post-traumatic stress, sadness, anger, anxiety, depression, and grief have also already been documented, particularly because of displacement, losing valued territory and ecosystems, or concerns for future generations [23–25]. It is important to remember that health and wellness for Pacific Islanders requires a balance of several aspects, such as spirit, body, mind, and environment [25,26], and climate change threatens this balance. Key factors that help avoid deterioration in mental health include one's sense of place, identity, spiritual wellbeing, and faith [25,27,28].

Other prominent NELD categories relate to human mobility and territory. Loss of human mobility commonly occurs through displacement, planned relocation, or voluntary immobility (i.e., rejection of the idea of relocation). Displacement and relocation away from land and territory in the Pacific risks severing physical, sociocultural, spiritual, and ancestral connections to land that can then affect one's sense of identity, wellbeing, community/social networks, and sense of place [29–31]. Material, social, cultural, and “ontological” security (i.e., the feeling of continuity based on a sense of belonging and confidence in identity) can be put at risk [32]. In fact, deep-rooted cultural and spiritual attachments to “place” and land mean that land is often considered an extension of “self” and provides a way of seeing, knowing, being in, and understanding the world [33–35]. In this sense, loss of land and territory, whether through inundation, salinisation, degradation, or displacement/relocation, threatens cultural roots and creates disorientation in identity, belonging, and ways of knowing [36].

The loss of cultural heritage can include both tangible aspects and intangible aspects, including rituals, customs, songs, dances, stories, agriculture, cooking, ancestral geologies, and collective identities. Several studies to date, from around the world, have documented the impacts of climate change on both physical cultural heritage (e.g., buildings, monuments, and artefacts) and intangible cultural heritage (e.g., cultural practices, traditions, and identity), the latter of which is a growing area [37]. From the Pacific, Cámara-Leret et al. [38] illustrated how climate change threatens New Guinea's biocultural heritage by causing local extinctions in wild foods, medicines, and ritual foods, which has cascading losses to the wellbeing and cultural integrity of Indigenous peoples. Diminishing aspects of cultural heritage can deteriorate communities' abilities to dynamically react to change. Relatedly, the loss of Indigenous and local knowledge (e.g., climate and weather observations, resource uses, bioclimatic indicators, crops, and planting calendars) and social capital are critical areas of loss and can occur because of declining verbal transmission and relevant application in a changing climate. Studies from around the world have documented losses to Indigenous and traditional knowledge related to weather forecasting, agriculture, medicine, and culturally significant species [39–41], although more documentation in the Pacific context is required. Losses to both intangible cultural heritage (e.g., cultural support networks, group identities, and reciprocity) and Indigenous/local knowledge are key concerns in the Pacific, where they play important roles in not only the adaptive capacity and social resilience of communities [42,43] but also their mental wellbeing [15,24].

Biodiversity and ecosystem services are key areas of loss, the latter of which focuses on the intrinsic or utilitarian value placed on ecosystems and collective biodiversity by local communities [13]. The significant pressures that drought and other extreme weather events place on ecosystems and endemic biodiversity in the Pacific have been well documented [22,44–46]. As material and intangible resources and services provided by ecosystems and biodiversity play foundational roles in Pacific peoples' lives, the cascading losses to livelihoods, health, nutrition, culture, ways of life, knowledge, community, and kinship have been recognised [12,29,47].

3. Study Site and Method

The Pacific Islands have been selected for their high exposure to the impacts of climate change [5]. The Pacific Islands region stretches across 33 million square kilometres (km²) and contains three main subregions: Melanesia, Micronesia, and Polynesia [48]. In total,

22 countries and territories are spread out across the region and are affected by both gradual and extreme weather events. In general, the exposure to climate hazards varies across the region, depending on whether the island's geological origin is either volcanic, reef, or limestone [49]. In particular, low-lying atolls (reef islands) are some of the most exposed places in the world to the impacts of climate change [4]. According to the IPCC [4], adaptation to the risks of sea-level rise, aridity, freshwater availability, and extreme cyclonic events at both the 1.5 °C and the 2 °C global warming scenarios are expected to be unfeasible for various low-lying atolls. As a result, "between 665,000 and 1.7 million people in the Pacific will be forced to migrate owing to sea level rise by 2050," particularly from Kiribati, Tuvalu, and the Marshall Islands [49], p. 5.

This study involved a desktop assessment to explore and summarise the perspectives of diverse Pacific Islander artists on experienced and anticipated noneconomic loss. The research capitalises on the themes and emotions conveyed through 44 creative/cultural works from across the Pacific Islands region. This included visual art ($n = 10$), poetry ($n = 8$), mixed media ($n = 8$), song ($n = 6$), film/videography ($n = 5$), documentary ($n = 4$), and theatre performance ($n = 3$). The selected works were systematically chosen to ensure representation where possible, on the basis of several factors, including gender, the artists' origin, the featuring island, and the artists' medium. This focus on existing creative works was deemed culturally appropriate and sensitive, as it meant individuals were communicating losses purely on the basis of their own desire and in their chosen formats, without any enforced or imposed narrative, format, or agenda [50,51].

Two search techniques were used to collect the secondary data: randomised and strategic. These respectively entailed either browsing online artwork hubs, artist websites and partnerships, and journal papers or undertaking tactical searches of different media types for each Pacific Island country. Attributes such as the climate change driver, most-prominent category of loss, publishing year, gender, origin, featuring island, migration status, and medium type were all collected. Data preparation and data formatting were then completed in Microsoft Word. All verbalised and filmed media were transcribed verbatim. Any non-English text provided by the artist was input into online translation software and included. All nonverbal works (e.g., art installations or paintings) were accompanied by an annotated description developed by the second author. Creative works were analysed only if the artist or personnel within the work identified as a Pacific Islander (e.g., a documentary may be filmed by a non-Pacific artist, yet any interviews conducted with a Pacific Islander could be analysed). Importantly, this method captures a static snapshot of loss in the Pacific, which should be complemented by future studies that capture ongoing causal relationships between NELD categories and cumulative encounters over time [52–54].

A two-fold and mixed qualitative-quantitative approach to analysis was applied to allow for a combination of numeric trends and in-depth explanations behind any emergent complex social phenomenon [55,56]. For qualitative data, latent content analysis was considered the most suitable method thanks to its emphasis on revealing underlying meaning, rather than using direct annotation [57]. Vaismoradi et al.'s [58] four-phase latent content analysis approach was employed for this study: (1) initialisation—highlight meaning units (organise and group similar discussions); (2) construction—classify and define labels (identify codes); (3) rectification—stabilise and compare related themes (reference data to meaning units); and (4) finalisation—develop the story line. The software program NVivo (version 12) was used for this process thanks to its advanced qualitative/thematic data management tools and its ability to filter emergent concepts from the applied literature [56]. The identification, classification, and interpretation of themes and storylines were also guided by the UNFCCC's [13] noneconomic loss categories, alongside literature on the ideologies of culture, identity, land-seascape connection, and spirituality [24,59]. Manifest content analysis was then used to capture the distribution of the results on a macro and surface level. This involved recording the frequency of qualitative references made from the core categories of the UNFCCC [13,55]. This additional analysis provided another layer

of insight and measurement, particularly thanks to the prominence and distribution of noneconomic loss types documented by the arts community.

3.1. Overview of Findings

All creative works analysed ($n = 44$) were published within the period 2002–2020 (see Appendix A for a full list). An analysis of the works revealed the vast array of artists, theatre characters, poets, and documentary cast, among others, experiencing loss. Of these creative works, the collection featured works from 10 Pacific Island countries, including the Marshall Islands ($n = 9$), Fiji ($n = 6$), Kiribati ($n = 4$), Tonga ($n = 4$), the Federated States of Micronesia ($n = 3$), Papua New Guinea ($n = 3$), Tuvalu ($n = 2$), Vanuatu ($n = 2$), the Cook Islands ($n = 1$), and Tokelau ($n = 1$). Also included were Hawaii (USA, $n = 3$) and New Zealand ($n = 1$), and many works did not apply to a specific country but rather the shared losses of the entire collective of the Pacific region ($n = 5$).

All the eight preidentified UNFCCC [13] noneconomic loss types emerged as themes within the data. The four most prominent losses were to a person's territory (69 references), cultural heritage (30 references), human mobility (26 references), and health (23 references). These, along with the two emerging loss types of identity (18 references) and agency (12 references), will be discussed in more detail in the following sections.

In terms of geographical spread, the distribution of total losses proved evenly dispersed, except for a higher number of references associated with the Marshall Islands and Tokelau. The diverse types of loss experienced within each country varied slightly between each of the three subregions. In Melanesia, biodiversity loss in the region's well-known rich and extensive natural resources was prominent, especially in Fiji, Vanuatu, and PNG [60]. Territory loss was significant in Micronesia, and this was likely due to the loss of highly exposed low-lying atoll countries such as Kiribati and the Marshall Islands [49]. Cultural heritage loss was particularly prominent in Polynesia, especially in the remote communities of Tonga and the Cook Islands, which are renowned for their vibrant cultural legacies [61].

3.2. Prominent Loss Types: Territory, Cultural Heritage, Mobility, and Health

3.2.1. Territory

Territory was the most prominently shared loss across all creative works (69 references). Several artists produced artworks portraying an inability to draw the boundaries of their homelands or provided a visualisation of their islands as completely submerged by sea-level rise [62–65]. Three key storylines emerged on loss of territory: a degraded sense of belonging, upheld pride, and a suffered injustice.

The communicated impacts on one's sense of belonging evoke the strong emotional and spiritual connections that Pacific Islanders have to land, which forms the crux of identity:

"I think when the Marshall Islands will be gone, it is like the end of life to me. Imagining that is very horrifying." [66], n.p.

"You see // these are my homes of Micronesia // the common thread of coconut fibre that weaves it all together // one // in every single one of these places our livelihoods, our livelihoods, our livelihoods // our names, our history, our legacy, our blood, our bones, our breath // is anchored in our oceans and burrowed in our land." [67], p. 253

"My umbilical cord is buried here, that is literally me going under the sea. We pray that the international community can do something, so I do not go under the sea. If Pukapuka goes under the sea, an important part of the world is lost. We pray that youth all around the world learn to protect their environment for many generations." [68], n.p.

The second theme captures the presence of pride and empowerment among the artists in the face of territory loss, highlighting the resilience of Pacific artists in their avoiding emotional collapse and persevering with integrity and dignity. Pride in belonging to land enabled a distinct capacity to effect a sense of hope and protest despite the inevitable

emotions of fear, concern, and sorrow [69–74]. This is clearly reflected in several of the creative works analysed, including poems, a song, and a short film (based on a stage performance):

“The media turns a blind eye to that in a state of anger fear and panic//people act//we do not flee//we act//we will not flee//we will act//because with each rising wave is our rising resilience//and sense of justice and urgency for home, for us.” [72], n.p.

“No one’s drowning, baby//no one’s moving//no one’s losing//their homeland//no one’s gonna become//a climate change refugee//or should I say//no one else//to the Carteret islanders of Papua New Guinea//to the Taro islanders of the Solomon Islands//I take this moment//to apologize to you//we are drawing the line here//because baby we are going to fight.” [69], n.p.

“My people and children, my own country, stand firm and stay strong until the end of time.” [72], n.p.

“The land that connects us, the land that unites us. A symbol of life, forever we’re strong.” [74], n.p.

Strongly intertwined within the same narrative is a sense of anger and the associated call for compensation and responsibility, revealing the third theme of suffered injustice. A sense of international complacency towards climate change informs how Pacific Islanders experience and apprehend the anticipated loss of their territory as a rightful demand for justice [69–71,75]. Sentiments of betrayal and stress follow this theme and highlight the failure of developed countries to uphold basic human rights:

“You think you have decades//before your homes fall beneath tides?//we have years//we have months before you sacrifice us again//before you watch from your tv and computer screen waiting//to see if we will still be breathing//while you do nothing.” [70], n.p.

The theatre performance *Disaffected* also invokes this idea of climate change injustice through the symbolic representation of Kiribati as a marketable “object” in the international market:

“Item two! Enjoy some of the finest soft white sand and crystal-clear waters the Pacific has to offer, Kiribati! Just enough land for one and a guest. Sail from island to island to island, knowing the last footprints were yours! Current bid, 247 billion dollars.” [75], n.p.

The loss of a person’s territory is undeniably interlaced with repercussions on a person’s sense of belonging, place attachment, and identity. However, alongside this vulnerability, the strong connections to land give rise to a sense of pride and empowerment, motivating an international call for climate change justice.

3.2.2. Cultural Heritage

The loss of cultural heritage was the second-most-prevalent referenced loss (30 references). Cultural loss could be summarised either as fragile and static or as fluid and dynamic. As summarised by a Carteret Islander community member in the documentary *Sun Come Up*, “Most of our culture will have to live in memory” [76], n.p. Static cultural heritage was associated primarily with the physical remains of buried ancestral bones throughout the Pacific. The delicate and immobile nature of these graves means that relocation is considered disrespectful and not an option for loss avoidance [77]. For instance, bones are described/illustrated as spilling and torn from graves during extreme weather events [62,71,78], thereby disrupting the sacred bond between culture and land by removing a person’s emotional connection passed down through generations. A theatre performance by Pelesasa [77], titled *Te Molimau*, describes the forthcoming loss of ancestral connection in 2060, just moments prior to Tokelau’s becoming completely submerged. The main character, Vitolina, reveals her thoughts:

“You want to know what I see when I look out there? I see a graveyard. I see a sinking vaka and all our ancestors are the passengers. We didn’t do this to ourselves! While people like you were out there living, we were moving our homes inland, we were building walls, heaving water out of the sinking graves of our dead, collecting what remains, and for what? What did you do to stop it?” [77], p. 40

These sentiments are similarly reflected in Hereniko’s [74] short film that is based on a stage performance titled *Moana Rua: The Rising Sea*:

“Something is missing//our Indigenous ways//our ancestors wailing//crying for our help//our elders grow weary//...//The things that we knew are lost forever//We need to go back, go back to our toots//We need to remember the things that are lost//We need to go back, go back to our roots.” [74], n.p.

“If we lose our lands, they too might disappear along with our languages, our oral traditions. Our world and yours too will be a poorer place don’t you think? Even if you are willing to welcome us to your shores, what about the bones of our ancestors? How can we forget our past, our ways of life, our hearts and our soul?” [74], n.p.

Culture was also characterised as fluid and dynamic, effectively responding to external changes as a living entity (i.e., naturally evolving over time). In this way, changes to everyday nonmaterial practised culture (e.g., one’s way of life, language, dance, song, communal living, and food sharing) are experienced as transformations. This outlook is described by the Waa’gey Group [79] during their filmed workshop at Yap Catholic High School:

“It depends on how you see culture because to me I think that culture is ... how should I put it? It is a living thing. It keeps moving and it keeps changing. Climate change is continuing, and I do not think our culture will be lost if we do our best to keep it. However, I think our culture will change. Instead of being lost, it will change.” [79], n.p.

The prospect of retaining culture through this dynamic transformation can, however, be hindered by the lack of intergenerational transference of cultural legacies [77,80].

In summary, most of the cultural heritage loss focused on the intrinsic relationship between land and culture (e.g., connection to ancestors), highlighting the interconnection with loss of territory. An adjustment in the framing of cultural loss, however, also emerged, whereby change is seen as a transformation.

3.2.3. Human Mobility

The loss of human mobility featured as the third-most-prominent noneconomic loss type (26 references). Voluntary immobility featured most prominently in the narrative, underlaid by a series of ideologies, including faith, dignity, place attachment, suffering, and suicide. Overall, the core philosophy shared by artists was their preference to remain on or in their homelands. The importance of retaining the power to choose is described by Jetñil-Kijiner [70] in her joint poem “Rise: From One Island to Another”:

“Sister of ice and snow//I offer you this shell//and the story of the two sisters//as testament//as declaration//that despite everything//we will not leave//instead//we will choose stone//we will choose//to be rooted to this reef//forever.” [70], n.p.

The powerful sense of empowerment and resilience described here and elsewhere was often underlaid by an artist’s connection to place, dignity, and faith [65,71]. Combined, these three themes highlight the value placed on an artist’s connections to land and their commitment to self-preservation. In this way, the act of remaining behind to uphold values is worth more than any sense of anticipated suffering [66,77]. As Latai Taumoepeau [81], n.p. explained in her work, “there’s no dignity in that type of exodus.”

The same artist Taumoepeau explores climate change suffering through a series of confronting visuals in two of her performances: *Disaffected* and *I-Land-X-Isle*. Her performance *Disaffected* sees the artist suffocating herself with a bag of water enclosed around her head [75]. Similarly, *I-Land-X-Isle* grapples with ideologies of water torture as the artist straps herself directly underneath a large block of melting ice for several hours [82]. These symbolic life-threatening visuals make reference not only to the immense suffering that is associated with voluntary immobility and the unrelenting faith required to uphold a person's beliefs but also in some cases to a colossal trust in God's will to protect his people [65].

Faith driven or otherwise, suicidal tendencies were also described in the context of voluntary immobility. Artists have begun to noticeably correlate their own predicted fate alongside their homeland (e.g., "till the very end" submergence). In particular, the interactive documentary *The Last Generation*, published by the Frontline GroundTruth Project [66], features Wilmer, a young boy in the Marshall Islands, describing his devotion and personal sacrifice to remain behind:

"I'm going to stay here. I'm not going to leave, I'm going to stay watch, even if it means to drown." [66], n.p.

Further analogies of suicide were also identified in the theatre performance *Te Molimau*, by Pelesasa [77], where two Tokelauans refuse the last flight to safety to instead remain behind and drown. The written storyline grapples with future scenarios of mental health and the choice of loss of life from climate change. In summary, voluntary immobility highlights the lengths that Pacific Islanders are willing to go to in order to avoid losing not only personal agency and dignity but also the emotional and physical connection to land that comprises the crux of their identity.

3.2.4. Human Health

Loss of health featured as the fourth-most-prominent noneconomic loss type (23 references). Evocations of loss of health related primarily to the burdens of mental health rather than physical health. It became clear that mental and emotional wellbeing has already been compromised as an indirect ramification of climate change. Four key themes, namely depression, stress and anger, fear, and religious refuge, were identified within the narrative of mental health.

In relation to depression, the artists described emotions of defeat and failure, both within themselves and in their responsibilities to younger generations [72,77,81,83]. This emotional burden is reflected in the following excerpts:

"What will be our future//what will be the future of our children?//searching for myself//seeking a refuge as the world is getting worse day and night//my day is so much pain//my day is much struggle//I cry to my Lord to help me through//my people and children // my own country//stand firm and stay strong until the end of time//climate change is so strong." [72], n.p.

"We're the generation that failed. That's how we will be remembered." [77], p. 42

Stress and anger were also clearly depicted in Teaero's [73] poem "What Is," where they highlight how diverse and intersecting pressures create a sense of being that is overwhelmed and angry:

"What is ... rising, rising, rising? Global warming//population//cost of living//expectations//blood pressure//unemployment//inflation//stress//temper." [73], p. 69

Parallel to this, some artists also disclosed a powerful sense of fear and distress at the thought of being displaced, losing their social networks, and living isolated in diaspora owing to climate change [66,74,83–85]. As one artist explained, "Our fear rose with each rising wave" [83], n.p.. In this context, some artists sought refuge in their religion and faith as a useful tool to comprehend their feelings and gain a sense of comfort [74,81,86]: "I cry to

my Lord to help me through” (Taki, 2013, n.p.). The act of creative expression itself can also provide psychological healing and personal transformation by providing an alternative communication avenue [81].

The painful emotions that accompany grief and mourning (e.g., fear, stress, sorrow, anger, and shame) can disrupt a person’s mental, emotional, social, and spiritual health. This can then undermine an individual’s resilience and capacity to respond to climate change impacts. Although religious faith and creative expression were avenues that support the grieving process, a devastating emotional burden persists and thus requires further care and action.

3.3. *Emerging Loss Types: Identity and Agency*

In analysing the creative works of Pacific Islander artists, two prominent and cross-cutting themes emerged that warrant greater attention. We emphasise the importance of considering identity and agency as emerging themes/types that build on the eight loss types outlined in the UNFCCC [13] technical paper.

3.3.1. Identity

Loss of identity emerged within the data collection as a noneconomic consequence of disrupting the artist’s prime meaning of existence (17 references). The two major themes that constitute the foundation of an artist’s identity were homeland and culture. If these pillars become distorted, individuals are unable to define themselves in relation to the world around them [68,74,87].

For Pacific Islanders, the multidimensional and complex connection to land plays an integral role in daily life and acts as the foundation of identity. Artists highlight their homeland as a central focal point of their existence and, subsequently, the building block that individuals will draw upon to describe their own personal narrative, values, ambitions, and ventures. This ideology is reflected by Howard [74] in her poem “We Are Human at the Wrong Place at the Wrong Time.” Her poem discloses how a person’s identity is exposed to the impacts of climate change through a deeply rooted connection to locality. The anticipated loss (e.g., submergence) of their homelands, therefore, corresponds with the loss of sense of self in respect to the world around them. Others highlight the following:

“I think when the Marshall Islands will be gone, it’s the end of life to me.” [66], n.p.

“If Pukapuka goes under the sea, we are all under the sea. My umbilical cord is buried here, that is literally me going under the sea.” [68], n.p.

“A disaster, a catastrophe//when it returns to the sea//breaking the hearts of its people//taking the name of its people//to forever live below the sea.” [88], n.p.

“and after all this//tell them about the water//how we have seen it rising//flooding across our cemeteries//gushing over the sea walls//and crashing against our homes//tell them what it’s like//to see the entire ocean level with the land//tell them//we are afraid//tell them we don’t know//of the politics//or the science//but tell them we see//what is in our own backyard//tell them that some of us//are old fishermen who believe that God//made us a promise//some of us//are more skeptical of God//but most importantly tell them//we don’t want to leave//we’ve never wanted to leave//and that we//are nothing without our islands.” [84], n.p.

Along similar lines, cultural legacies and livelihoods that have been passed down through generations provide a comprehensive framework of meaning through which Pacific Islanders form their identity to distinguish themselves from others. This process is reflected by the 350 Pacific Climate Warriors [80] campaign, where a local chief describes the trajectory of ni-Vanuatu’s losing their identity from a loss of cultural activities and, through this, “becoming nothing more than a wasteland.” In Hereniko’s [74], n.p. short film, Chief Telematua also links the loss of land and cultural legacies with sense of self by

asking, “Even if you are willing to welcome us to your shores, what about the bones of our ancestors? How can we forget our past, our ways of life, our hearts and our soul?”

In summary, a person’s identity is lost or becomes heavily distorted when their culture or homeland is compromised or lost—in effect, leaving a substantial rupture in the pathways previously used to develop their concept of self.

3.3.2. Agency

A person’s capacity to make decisions, act (individually or collectively), and determine their future in the face of climate change was also identified as an emerging loss type (12 references). Two major themes of sacrifice and injustice were identified within the loss narrative around agency, reflecting a sense of violation to the right to self-determination.

Most noticeably, the loss of agency was described in relation to the UNFCCC Paris Agreement [71,89]. The global warming target transition (2 °C limit and 1.5 °C intention) accepts the collateral damage of Pacific Islanders’ livelihoods, homes, and cultures, and it knowingly forfeits their agency in controlling the future of their homelands. This transitional loss is described by Leem [71] in her poem “More Than Just a Blue Passport”:

“For bigger countries mock us // after they have violated the earth’s virginity with their carbon filled aphrodisiac // digging and pumping off from our mother’s womb relentlessly // constantly mocking us // at one point five degrees at the risk of my people becoming climate change refugees // becoming stateless // becoming landless // becoming just a blue passport.” [71], n.p.

Leem [71] describes the monopolist nature of climate change negotiations which removes any sense of decision-making authority from Pacific Islanders. Notions of economic leverage are also uncovered by Siagatonu [90] in her poem “Layers”:

“There are those who want to talk about climate change, yet don’t want to talk about how those who are affected the most, can’t prioritise it in the first place because prioritising it would mean being forced to pull the layers back and also talk about the poverty, the racism, the injustice, the privilege, the hush money, the hit lists that climate change is operating from. The rounds it makes on earth, starting with the most vulnerable.” [90], n.p.

Here, Siagatonu [90] reveals the systemic issues and inequalities through which climate change operates, determining whom it exposes. In particular, this poem speaks to the exacerbation of injustice through racism and poverty within the context of climate change independence and privilege. This highlights the disparity between a country’s wealth, historical emissions, and climate change exposure.

4. Discussion

All the preidentified categories of loss, such as those identified by UNFCCC [13] and McNamara et al. [14,15], emerged as themes across the creative works. The main categories of noneconomic loss that emerged through our analysis, namely territory, cultural heritage, mobility, and health, closely align with those identified as most prominently documented across the academic literature [14].

In exploring the key subthemes and creative manifestations and expressions of these noneconomic loss categories, the complex and interconnected nature of NELD was clear, as previously emphasised by McNamara et al. [15]. In particular, the loss of territory was rarely described in isolation [2,7,9,52]. Land and place attachment played a significant role across NELD types, whether as a risk multiplier for other losses (e.g., sense of belonging, identity, and emotional wellbeing) or as a source of empowerment and motivation to act (e.g., shaping decisions to remain on/in homelands or motivating calls for justice). Of the three core components of “land” highlighted by Campbell [32], the creative mediums evoked the loss of social (e.g., community and kinship), cultural (e.g., place, identity, belonging, and ties to past and future), and material security (e.g., livelihoods) tied to the

loss of land, which have similarly been identified in other studies on noneconomic loss in the Pacific [29,30,47].

In essence, disruptions from climate change to land and place attachments can create cascading disruptions that unhinge a broader and highly embedded Indigenous sociocultural system with critical links to Pacific Islanders' pasts and futures. The value of land as a fixed reference point for the grounding of genealogies, historical legacies, and traditions cannot be underestimated. It is, therefore, clear why voluntary immobility and extremes of suicide emerged as central to the narratives on human mobility. For some artists, loss of land constitutes death [91,92], igniting a sense of urgency to preserve homelands and dignity and empowering individuals to effect a sense of hope and protest [33,93]. Although we do not intend to generalise the connections between people and their land in the Pacific [32], the cultural significance of belonging to land and the interconnected relations between people and place require greater attention in both policy and adaptation strategies related to loss.

The analysed creative works also exposed two emerging categories of noneconomic loss that not only further highlight and represent the interplays and interactions between noneconomic loss categories but also have instrumental benefits as their own categories [94]. We put forward, for example, that to gain a holistic understanding of noneconomic loss, losses to identity must be explored as parallel and interconnected loss narratives alongside those of land and territory. In essence, the exposure of land to climate change impacts in the Pacific also exposes a person's deep-rooted ideologies of culture, identity, and spiritual wellbeing, revealing the fragile links to extended loss [36]. The loss of identity is associated with substantial ruptures in the pathways that were previously used to develop one's concept of self, connoting also a loss in people's agency to determine their own self-conceptions [34].

The second emerging noneconomic loss category was agency. Agency can empower both an individual and a community to "engage fruitfully and meaningfully with the world" [95,96], and its removal means that people are unable to make decisions about their basic needs and future desires [8,9,92,95,96]. The strong theme of the loss of agency in relation to human mobility was clear in the creative and cultural works. The theme of voluntary immobility among artists represents an act to preserve a sense of agency and make decisions about their own futures in the face of relocation threats. In this context, agency relates to empowerment, decision-making capacity, and the maintenance of dignity. However, our findings demonstrate that the theme of agency transcends loss categories, rather than being solely affiliated to human mobility as in the UNFCCC categories [13]. In fact, agency is diminished through a complex web of interconnected injustices [16], and its loss has broader applicability in people's general capacities to make decisions about their own futures, values, and desires. This is especially relevant in the context of key international climate negotiations and the capacity to determine the future conditions of homelands.

Processing experienced loss and anticipated loss is critical so that hope is possible, and energy can be reinvested in resilience and post-traumatic growth [7]. In analysing the creative works related to noneconomic loss, we were able to identify some of the key responses to and strategies for processing and coping with noneconomic loss and feeling a sense of empowerment and hope. In particular, the processing and comfort benefits that can be drawn from religious faith and creative processes emerged. Faith was communicated as a "vertical resource" whereby an individual finds comfort in prayer, but it can also function as a "horizontal resource" whereby communities feel a comforting sense of togetherness through collective prayer, religious ceremonies, and rituals ([25,27], [28] p. 258). The role of creative processes for empowerment and hope as well as investing energy in resilience and post-traumatic growth also emerged [97]. Creative processes are allowing Pacific Islanders to break down barriers to communication and are fostering settings for discussion, especially in terms of reconnecting global negotiations to questions of injustice, culpability, and responsibility [16,17]. These creative works are shifting the framing around climate

change in the Pacific to one of climate justice, foregrounding the intrinsic human rights and desire for the self-determination of Pacific Islanders, who are active agents of change and who need to have their voices listened to [98]. These findings offer insights into the kinds of processes that support processing and transformation while offering comfort, hope, and motivation to act, from the individual scale to the international scale.

5. Conclusions

Because of their physical vulnerability to climate risks, Pacific Island countries' exposure to loss is greater than that of most others. Documenting and planning for NELD in the Pacific Islands is, however, still in its infancy. This study has leveraged the rich insights and critical narrativity around climate change loss provided by 44 creative works. The dominant narratives of loss communicated through these creative works revolved around territory, human mobility, cultural heritage, and human health, although the interconnectedness of these losses is deeply embedded within identity and agency—loss types that in this research have been emphasised as their own categories. Loss occurs in an interconnected and complex system that is centred on the critical relationships between people and their land, and greater attention must be paid to these complex relations. Additionally, these creative works have re-emphasised the ongoing calls for reconnecting global negotiations to questions of injustice, culpability, and responsibility and have foregrounded climate justice, human rights, and the desire for self-determination in Pacific climate experiences.

These findings provide empirical knowledge and conclusions that can be easily transferred to a format that is digestible not only for local policy and decision-making but also for communication in international fora and climate negotiations (e.g., UNFCCC and WIM). It is critical that findings around NELD be better integrated into constructions of climate change impact as well as decision-making and policymaking in the Pacific. This will help ensure that future planning efforts are not skewed and people's experiences of intangible loss are not discounted or excluded [99–101]. This will be critical for building greater resilience and informing policy and decision-making around mechanisms to deal with NELD. Future studies should attempt to further build on, unpack, and refine these findings by exploring other communication avenues, engaging directly with people through participatory community-based fieldwork [102], and going beyond a static snapshot of loss. This would involve exploring the ongoing causal relationships between different NELD categories and capturing cumulative encounters with NELD over time to understand where trade-offs exist and what may be tolerable and intolerable in the future [52–54].

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Appendix A

Table A1. Full list of creative works analysed as part of this study.

Title	Artist/Author/Director			Year	Creative Media	Featuring Island	Climate Hazard
	Name	Gender	Origin				
Ailan I Draun Long Solwarra (Islands Drowning in the Sea)	Eric Natuolavi	M	Vanuatu	2009	Art (installation)	Vanuatu	Rising sea levels
Canoe-Building Campaign	350 Pacific Climate Warriors	M/F	Vanuatu	2014	Videography	Vanuatu	Rising sea levels, cyclones, coral bleaching, drought, coastal erosion
Climate Change	Brian Taki	M	Kiribati	2013	Song	Kiribati	Rising sea levels, king tides, saltwater intrusion
Climate Change Sinking Coconut Island	Joe Nalo	M	Papua New Guinea	2012	Art	Papua New Guinea	Rising sea levels
Climate Change Song	Kiribati Church	M/F	Kiribati	2015	Song	Kiribati	Rising sea levels
Climate Change versus Traditional Knowledge	Wag'gey	M/F	Federated States of Micronesia	2016	Documentary	Federated States of Micronesia	All different climate change impacts (not specific)
Dear Matafele Peinem	Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner	F	Marshall Islands	2014	Poetry	Marshall Islands	Rising sea levels
Dear Trump, the Pacific Is Here to Stay	The Beat	M/F	Fiji	2017	Song	Fiji	Cyclones
Diasporic Waters	Joy Enomoto	F	Hawaii	2014	Art	Hawaii	Rising sea levels, coastal erosion
Disaffected	Latai Taumoepeau, Valerie Berry and Ryuichi Fujimura	F	Mixed Group	2016	Theatre	Tonga	Cyclones, rising sea levels, salination, drought, dust storms
Ebbing Tagaloa	Paula Schaafhausen	F	Samoa	2015	Art (installation)	New Zealand	Rising sea levels, coastal erosion, temperature rise
Holding On	Angela Tiatia	F	New Zealand	2015	Videography	Tuvalu	Rising sea levels
Homes of Micronesia	Yolanda Joab	F	Federated States of Micronesia	2019	Poetry	Federated States of Micronesia	Rising sea levels, drought, cyclones
Hū mai, ala mai	Kaili Chun	F	Hawaii	2020	Art	Hawaii	Rising sea levels, coastal erosion
I-Land-X-Isle	Latai Taumoepeau	F	Tonga	2012	Theatre	Tonga	Rising sea levels
I Grew Giant	Selina Neirok Leem	F	Marshall Islands	2019	Poetry	Marshall Islands	Rising sea levels, cyclones

Table A1. Cont.

Title	Artist/Author/Director			Year	Creative Media	Featuring Island	Climate Hazard
	Name	Gender	Origin				
Koburake	Tom Toakai/Nei Tabera Ni Kai	M	Kiribati	2010	Song	Kiribati	Rising sea levels
Kuita (Octopus)	Rusiate Lali	M	Fiji	2017	Art	Fiji	Flooding, coral bleaching
Layers	Terisa Siagatonu	F	Samoa	2015	Poetry	All Pacific	Drought, rising sea levels
Moana Rua: The Rising of the Sea	Vilsoni Hereniko	M	Mixed Group	2015	Film (based on stage production)	All Pacific	Rising sea levels
More Than a Blue Passport	Selina Neirok Leem	F	Marshall Islands	2016	Poetry	Marshall Islands	Rising sea levels
Nukukehe—Toku Matua	Te Vaka/Spirit of Play Productions/Opetaia Foa'i	M	Mixed Group	2002	Song	Tuvalu	Rising sea levels
Our Atoll Speaks	Talcual Films	F	Cook Islands	2019	Film	Cook Islands	Rising sea levels, salination, changing weather patterns and coastal erosion
Praise Song for Oceania	Dr. Craig Santos Perez	M	Guam	2016	Poetry and Videography	All Pacific	Rising sea levels, cyclones, coral bleaching, drought, coastal erosion
Post 1	ArtbyNeilan	F	Marshall Islands	2019	Art	Marshall Islands	Rising sea levels
Post 2	ArtbyNeilan	F	Marshall Islands	2019	Art	Marshall Islands	Rising sea levels
Repatriate	Latai Taumoepeau	F	Tonga	2015	Film	Tonga	Rising sea levels
Rise: From One Island to Another	Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner and Aka Niviâna (Greenland)	F	Marshall Islands	2018	Poetry and Videography	Marshall Islands	Rising sea levels, ice melting, king tides, erosion
Shark Attack	Rusiate Lali	M	Fiji	2017	Art	Fiji	Rising sea levels, king tides, flooding
She Who Dies to Live	Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner, Jocelyn Kapumealani Ng and Terisa Siagatonu	F	Mixed Group	2019	Poetry and Theatre	All Pacific	Cyclones, rising sea levels
Storm Tracking	Dr. Craig Santos Perez	M	Guam	2018	Poetry	All Pacific	Flooding and cyclones

Table A1. Cont.

Title	Artist/Author/Director			Year	Creative Media	Featuring Island	Climate Hazard
	Name	Gender	Origin				
Subject to Change	Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade New Zealand (Produced by Amiria Ranfurly) and Massey University	M	Fiji	2018	Documentary	Fiji	Cyclones (TC Winston), rising sea levels, thermal expansion, ocean acidification
Sun Come Up	Jennifer Redfearn (Director) and Ursula Rakova and Carteret Islands community members	F	USA and Papua New Guinea	2010	Documentary	Papua New Guinea	Rising sea levels
Te Molimau	Taofia Pelesasa	M	Tokelau	2019	Theatre	Tokelau	Rising sea levels, coastal erosion
Tell them	Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner	F	Marshall Islands	2011	Poetry and Videography	Marshall Islands	Rising sea levels, rising temperatures
The Killer Waves	Joe Nalo	M	Papua New Guinea	2005	Art	Papua New Guinea	Tsunamis
The Last Generation	Frontline and the GroundTruth Project	M/F	Marshall Islands	2018	Documentary (interactive)	Marshall Islands	Cyclones, rising sea levels, king tides, flooding, saltwater intrusion, coral bleaching, drought
The Process of Becoming	Jocelyn Kapumealani Ng and Dr. Keisha Bahr	F	Hawaii	2019	Photography and Body Art	Hawaii	Temperature rise, coral bleaching
The Uprooted Tree	Ceelah Joy (Oceanianpoet)	F	Tonga	2020	Poetry	Tonga	Cyclone (TC Harold)
Voices To Climate Change	KCCN	M/F	Kiribati	2014	Song	Kiribati	Rising sea levels
Waa In Storms—What Is	Tewaeiaraki Tearo	M	Kiribati	2004	Poetry and Art	Fiji	Rising temperatures, cyclones
Waa In Storms—Disasters	Tewaeiaraki Tearo	M	Kiribati	2004	Poetry and Art	Fiji	Rising temperatures, cyclones
Waa In Storms—Quiet Moments	Tewaeiaraki Tearo	M	Kiribati	2004	Poetry and Art	Fiji	Erosion, sea-level rise, cyclones
We Are Human at the Wrong Place at the Wrong Time	Josie Howard	F	Federated States of Micronesia	2019	Poetry	Federated States of Micronesia	Rising sea levels, coastal erosion, temperature rise

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