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Essay

Small Island Risks: Research Reflections for Disaster Anthropologists and Climate Ethnographers

Crystal A. Felima

Department of Anthropology, College of Arts and Sciences, University of Kentucky, Lexington, KY 40506-0027, USA; crystal.felima@uky.edu

Abstract: Disasters and climate-related events, including tropical storms, droughts, coastal erosion, and ocean acidification, threaten small island nations. Given the urgency of reducing disaster risks and the effects of climate change on vulnerable populations, this reflection essay pursues three objectives. First, it highlights the role of anthropology, ethnography, and multi-sited research in exploring disaster impacts, climate crises, and public policy in island communities. It then highlights national planning and inter-regional activities to build awareness of various risk reduction efforts by island nations and multi-governmental organizations. This article concludes with discussion prompts to engage researchers, scholars, students, and practitioners studying and working in small island nations. Due to the growing interest in climate equity and justice, this paper argues that anthropologists can offer valuable methodologies and approaches to develop transdisciplinary and nuanced insights into researching disaster risk reduction efforts and climate policy networks in and across island nations.

Keywords: small islands; disasters; climate change; risk reduction; disaster anthropology; climate ethnography; public policy; multi-sited research

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1. Introduction

Small island communities face profound challenges from the ever-increasing impacts of disasters and climate change.[1] Acknowledged by the United Nations, Small Island Developing States (SIDS) represent a group of 39 states and 18 associate members.[2] With a population of 65 million, constituting slightly less than 1 percent of the global population, these island nations are distributed across three geographical regions: the Atlantic, Indian Ocean, and South China Sea (AIS), the Caribbean, and the Pacific. The significance of SIDS is underscored by the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Brazil, where these islands were identified as a special case requiring focused attention for socio-economic development and environmental sustainability. To address these challenges, the United Nations Barbados Program of Action for the Sustainable Development of SIDS identified 14 priority areas, including climate change and rising sea levels, natural hazards, environmental disasters, and natural resource management. Several international agreements to support SIDS followed, such as the Mauritius Strategy, the Samoa Pathway, the 2030 Agenda, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, the Paris Agreement, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, and the Glasgow Climate Pact.

SIDS contribute to less than 1 percent of global greenhouse gas emissions, yet they bear a disproportionate burden of the adverse effects of climate change (United Nations 2015). While small island states exhibit diverse topographies, cultures, histories, economies, political systems, and population demographics, they share commonalities that heighten their susceptibility to disasters and climate-related risks. These shared features encompass their physical size, expanding populations, vulnerable environments and natural resources, proneness to weather-related hazards, exposure to external shocks and stresses due to the reliance on foreign assistance, the openness of their economies, relative remoteness,

and underdeveloped critical infrastructure and resources. These vulnerability factors collectively influence small island states' capabilities to mitigate and adapt to disaster and environmental impacts (Mycoo et al. 2022; Pelling and Uitto 2001).

Climate change poses immediate and significant threats, such as sea level rise, extreme precipitation, increased weather events, the loss of biodiversity and marine life, and critical infrastructure failure. The 2015 Paris Agreement, adopted by 196 parties, committed countries to limit the global average temperature rise to 2 °C above pre-industrial levels and to aim for 1.5 °C. However, as the World Meteorological Organization (2022, p. 33) noted, the world is on course to exceed these agreed temperature thresholds, increasing disaster and climate risks, particularly for populations in small island developing nations. Climate change impacts the frequency, intensity, spatial extent, duration, and temporal patterns of climate-related events, which have increased fivefold between 1970 and 2019, causing more economic losses and damages but fewer casualties (World Meteorological Organization 2021). For example, the intensity and impact of Hurricanes Irma and Maria during the 2017 tropical cyclone season affected many small Caribbean Island nations—destroying critical infrastructure, disrupting the livelihoods of millions, and causing thousands of human losses. Limited institutional capacity, scarce financial resources, and high vulnerability compounded the effects of these cyclonic events, which reached a Category 5 status.[3] Hence, disaster vulnerabilities, risk, and sustainability shape small islands' adaptive capacity, climate sensitivity, and mitigation capabilities.

Due to the urgency of reducing disaster risks and building a climate-resilient future, this essay pursues three objectives. First, it draws attention to anthropologists and ethnographers in disaster studies, climate science, and public policy who work and partner with island communities. Anthropology, a discipline that values local and collective experiences and voices, is well positioned to respond to research and policy priorities in multi-stakeholder engagement. Global disaster risk reduction is coordinated through transnational and multilevel collaborative efforts. Thus, an ethnography on disaster networks and climate governance is not bound by a geographic place and may account for multiple actors in national and regional mitigation efforts. In this essay, I explore the role of multi-sited research, which, as Mark-Anthony Falzon (2009, p. 1–2) describes, "follow[s] people, connections, associations, and relationships across space" and surveys a "series of juxtapositions in which the global is collapsed into and made an integral part of parallel, related local situations, rather than something monolithic or external to them".

In addition to these methodological considerations, I also posit that working with and across island communities demands an ethics of care. Unfortunately, anthropologists have been accused of research practices that are harmful, extractive, and exploitative (Sanjek 2015). Thus, researchers must recognize the sensitivity of conducting research in communities impacted by disasters and climate crises.

As a cultural anthropologist in disaster studies with fieldwork experience in the Caribbean, specifically Haiti (Felima 2017), I am particularly interested in how small islands confront unique disaster risks and specific environmental challenges. From guidance documents to technical workshops, we learn that island leadership is at the forefront of disaster risk reduction and global climate action, making pivotal contributions to international discourse and policy. Thus, the second objective of this article is to center policy guidance and initiatives to offer insights into how island nations and organizations approach specific planning gaps and priorities. I briefly highlight publicly accessible small islands' disaster planning documents and climate policy strategies to spotlight strategic regional partnerships and proposed efforts. With the urgency of reducing the impacts of climate change on vulnerable communities and populations, learning more about the diverse policy initiatives pursued by small island nations is necessary for building our awareness of risk reduction priorities.

Imagining resilient futures requires us to continue to develop our knowledge, theoretical orientations, and literacy in disaster risks and climate vulnerabilities. Also, exchanging ideas and practices with others is critical to strengthening the fields of disaster research,

environmental sustainability studies, and climate science. My third contribution to this article offers discussion questions that may interest researchers, scholars, students, and practitioners studying and working in small island nations. The concluding questions invite engagement on disaster and climate-related themes and encourage conversations on researching risk reduction strategies of island communities.

2. Anthropology in Island Research

Disaster and climate change research on small island nations have been informed and complemented by interrelated topical areas, including risk and vulnerability, community resilience, livelihood assessment, resource management, adaptation, hazard mitigation, and environmental sustainability (Etongo and Arrisol 2021; Hay 2013; Oakes 2019; Robinson 2018; Shultz et al. 2019). Anthropologists have expanded disaster and ecological research of SIDS, including Joanna Davidson's (2012) work on ritual, religion, and climate change in Guinea-Bissau, Isabel C. Rivera-Collazo's (2020) study on coastal archaeology and the impact of Hurricane Maria in Puerto Rico, and Julia Morris' (2022) research on resource extraction, refugees, and climate change in Nauru. The growing field of disaster anthropology incorporates anthropological theories, concepts, and methodological tools to understand the individual and collective human experience of disaster events, ecological crises, and climate change (Koons and Trivedi 2021). As researchers of cultures and communities, anthropologists have developed our understanding of vulnerability, resilience, and adaptation, allowing us to think more analytically about disaster risk reduction, recovery, and climate action in local, global, and cross-cultural contexts (Barrios 2017; Faas 2022; Schuller 2016; Trivedi 2020).

Through fieldwork and ethnography, anthropologists qualify the experiences of those impacted by climate change and ecological issues and survey human practices and structures that shape and influence disastrous outcomes and environmental inequalities (Oliver-Smith and Hoffman 1999). Ethnography is the writing of people, society, and culture and is often associated with what anthropologists do, write, and read as researchers and scholars (McGranahan 2014, p. 23). In writing on culture and climate change, Susan Crate (2011) termed "climate ethnography" as a new level of engagement in which anthropologists can commit to multi-sited, interdisciplinary, and critically collaborative work that disrupts how we frame resilience and adaptation and further develops cultural models of climate change perceptions of local communities. Additionally, the ethnography of disasters and climate change, as a research method, can be used to explore the practices and dynamics of network governance of institutions and organizations, collaboration between stakeholders, and global partnerships in public policy.

Anthropological research in disaster, ecological, and climate studies vary, from reviewing the relationship between climate change, violence, and social and environmental conditions (Shaffer 2017) to participatory mapping of local knowledge and perception of climate change and coping strategies in Switzerland (Reichel and Frömming 2014). Disaster anthropologists and climate ethnographers have been particularly interested in how risk, vulnerability, and exposure shape the lives and futures of cultures and communities across various geographies. Disaster risk is the probability of adverse consequences such as property damage, injuries, casualties, socio-economic impacts, and disruption to essential services (UNDP 2010). Risk is a function of hazards and vulnerability, and can be mitigated by an individual or local capacity for protection and large-scale risk reduction efforts(Wisner et al. 2012, p. 24).

Vulnerability, resilience, and adaptation are defined and interpreted differently by scholars across various disciplines. Vulnerability is commonly defined as the potential for loss (Cutter 1996, p. 529) or the susceptibility to harm or injury (Adger 2006, p. 269). Disaster anthropologists have problematized the term vulnerability, noting that it may be limited and misused while also misrepresenting communities without properly contextualizing power and access (Faas 2016; Marino and Faas 2020).

Similarly, resilience also suffers from definition challenges. Resilience is the ability to prepare, plan for, survive, recover from, cope with, or successfully adapt to the impacts of disasters, climate-related trends and events, and ecological crises (Cutter et al. 2008; National Research Council 2012). Anthropologist Roberto Barrios (2016) argues that resilience may be depoliticized, ignoring structural processes that shape disaster outcomes.

Resilience may also be defined as the ability to "bounce back" or "bounce forward" into a state of "normalcy" after a disaster (Cox and Perry 2011). In my work on Haiti, I avoid labeling Haitians as "resilient". In an interview after the 2010 January earthquake in Haiti, Haitian American novelist and short story writer Edwidge Danticat stated that ". . .I think some people take that resilience [in Haiti] to mean that we [Haitians] can suffer more than other people, and I think that's the danger (Holdengräber 2017, p. 95)". This danger, Danticat (2011, p. 257) shares, leads to "passive hurt, as in a lack of urgency or neglect". Therefore, the narrative of resilience can risk positioning people in critical need of aid to be ignored because of their "extraordinary" abilities to bounce back, withstand, and adapt to the impacts of crises.

The IPCC (2014, p. 5) defines adaptation as "the process of adjustment to actual or expected climate and its effects" in which it "seeks to moderate or avoid harm or exploit beneficial opportunities" and "may facilitate adjustment to expected climate and its effects". Perspectives from anthropology consider adaptation's social, cultural, political, and economic dimensions. Anthony Oliver-Smith (2017, p. 278), a pioneer of disaster anthropology, writes that adaptation is dynamic and manifested through cultural beliefs, behaviors, or technologies to facilitate survival and reproduction. Environmental anthropologist Sarah E. Vaughn (2022) takes us a step further to consider how climate adaptation projects reinforce the racial politics of Guyana.

Despite the varied definitions and disciplinary distinctions of resilience, vulnerability, and adaptation, these terms are useful in disaster and climate research. By utilizing anthropological theories and methods, we can further engage and integrate community perspectives into our analysis ofdisaster risk and climate action of small island nations. Local perspectives and collective experiences aid in our understanding of inequalities and the consequences of social, economic, and political issues of peripheral populations. Also, leveraging local perspectives, theoretical insights, and scientific data enhances disaster preparedness, response, and recovery efforts. Environmental anthropologist Heather Lazrus (2012) notes that island-based ecological insights and ways of knowing about climate change can include weather forecasting, land and water navigation, more-than-human knowledge, coastal management, community-based conservation, agricultural techniques, and collective disaster and crisis interpretations.

Anthropology can help bridge the study of hazards and the experiences of those encountering ecological crises. An "anthropology of events," as Philip Carl Salzman (1999, p. 3) argues, considers the relationship between human experience and an event (e.g., drought, flood, famine, and warfare), which intrinsically "redirects lives, shapes them, terminates them, [and] liberates them". When disaster and climate-related events reoccur and are socially and culturally known and understood, researchers can further engage "the anthropology of experience," in which people interpret their experiences as expressions, representations, and articulations, which serve as local meanings (Bruner 1986). Bridging ethnography, technocratic disaster studies, and climate science reinforces the need for integrated research approaches and acknowledges that at the confluence of these anthropologies, we can engage the interplay between ecological events, climate change, cultural landscapes, and socio-economic and political conditions.

While anthropology is a discipline of engagement and encounter, it can also be extractive and parasitic. Communities that have experienced crises and disasters may feel exhausted by interactions and surveillance from researchers, nongovernmental entities, and the media. In Haiti, my research collaborators often encountered individuals and groups entering their community for brief survey points and then promptly departing. Navigating disaster and climate research, especially in marginalized communities, requires

an approach grounded in ethics, care, and cultural awareness. The ethnographic project on disasters and climate change necessitates a heightened awareness of the ethical considerations of informed consent, cultural sensitivity, and minimizing the risks of trauma and anxiety. In *Affective Dimensions of Fieldwork and Ethnography*, edited by Thomas Stodulka et al. (2019), the contributing authors speak to questions of reciprocity, affect, power, and positionality in socio-cultural research in and with communities. In this same volume, Mechthild Von Vacano (2019) writes that reciprocity "...can manifest itself in material and non-material form, as emotional or practical support, as recognition, information, intercession, advocacy, labor, money, or goods". Recognizing my positionality, cultural background, and privileged global citizenship helps me acknowledge the power dynamics in interviewing, data collection, and interpretation in Haiti, a country with a complicated relationship with foreigners. While collecting flood narratives in Haiti, I committed to intentional fieldwork practices involving a significant investment of time and labor in communities. My fieldwork extended beyond data collection to building meaningful relationships, actively participating in community events, supporting youth programs, and delivering public presentations.

Furthermore, as an Africana anthropologist and Black feminist scholar in disaster studies, I am interested in ways to integrate academic disciplines with additional sources of knowledge to develop broader and richer insights into understanding the human experience. For example, Holmes et al. (2021) draw from anthropology, geography, planning, and social work to expand interdisciplinarity research on disasters. Therefore, building upon the insights of Black Studies scholars Stewart and Anderson (2015), I suggest anthropologists can go beyond the use of a multiple discipline analysis approach (multidisciplinary) and the synthetization of various disciplines into a framework (interdisciplinary). Instead, transdisciplinary approaches in disaster and climate research prioritize indigenous and local cultural knowledge and experiences and incorporate insights gained through a variety of methods, including narrative research, interviewing (in person and online), surveying, mapping and geospatial analysis, photovoice, participant observation, textual analysis, community participatory approaches, social media crowdsourcing, and oral histories. In addition, these various methodological approaches can enhance our ethnographic writing and help us engage questions of power, inequalities, processes, and structures in disaster anthropology and climate ethnography.

3. Ethnography of Organizations and Institutions

One of anthropology's contributions to disaster studies, climate science, and policy work is ethnography. As anthropology's principal methodological tool, ethnography has extended from site-specific case studies to multi-sited research to explore micro-processes and macro-structures (Marcus 1995, 1999). Susan Crate (2016, p. 154) notes, "Multisited ethnography involves the analytical engagement of local to global connections... [and]... reveals the ways that the climate science world and the social world are not separate but integral". Through critical ethnographic approaches in disaster anthropology and climate ethnography, anthropology and other social scientists can develop a richer and more nuanced understanding of decision-making and "power asymmetries" in disaster management, climate policy, and environmental governance (Himley 2008).

Island research in disasters and climate change considers the geographies and spatial arrangements of risk, vulnerability, and governance. In his article "Ethnography of environmental governance", Gregory Thaler (2021) helps us think through three approaches that may be useful to anthropologists studying disaster management and climate action in small island countries. Place-based ethnography involves researching within a geographically defined area, presenting an opportunity for targeted island research or a comparative project to study transnational and inter-regional practices and processes across island nations. This approach considers the concepts of space, place, and landscape, which hold cultural, socio-cultural, geographic, and political meanings and memories; communities

construct and negotiate their identities, worldviews, and ideologies through their spatial relationships with humans and more-than-human beings (Aucoin 2017).

Thaler (2021) also discusses institutional and organizational ethnography as methodological tools. He explains that just as institutions and organizations are conceptually distinct yet closely interrelated in meaning and function, we can also distinguish between institutional and organizational ethnography. Institutions are ruling systems or structures of social order that govern the behavior and interactions of individuals within a society. Organizations are specific entities or social structures created to achieve specific goals through the coordinated efforts of individuals or groups and can exist within larger institutional frameworks. Therefore, the institutional ethnography of small island nations could focus on various institutions, including state government, economy, legal systems, and the economy. Organizational ethnography can center on individual and collective actions, efforts, roles, responsibilities, and hierarchies in businesses, government agencies, non-profit organizations, and clubs.

An ethnography of organizations and institutions allows one to study networks where stakeholders collaborate, communicate, and participate in disaster management and climate action. In considering a "beyond place" perspective in disaster anthropology and climate ethnography, I follow Krauss's (2009, p. 150) argument that studying networks, cross-sectoral actions, and inter-regional institutions can be a radical form of multi-sited research. Network theory and analysis are descriptive and methodological tools used to identify, examine, and analyze the extended collection of actors, interactions, and flows in climate governance and disaster management. Scholars recognize the usefulness of network analysis and network theory perspectives in analyzing collaborative public management and governance (Bingham and O'Leary 2008; Ibarra et al. 2005). As Jane Fountain (1994, p. 273) states, "The network perspective offers rich descriptive capacity and rigorous methodologies for study of both micro- and macro-level organizational and interorganizational phenomena of great importance to public management". Anthropologists and other social scientists can explore stakeholders within interorganizational and inter-regional disaster management and climate governance by identifying the interaction between circulating articles or flows, including scientific and non-scientific texts, information products (e.g., graphs and maps), human beings and associated knowledge and skills, technologies, control and governance structures, and risk reduction funding (Callon 1990; Martin 2000). Through institutional ethnography, anthropologists can consider these flows to reveal the salient links and arrangements between actors and their interactions in climate action and disaster and emergency management in small islands.

Disaster and emergency management and climate organizations constitute a network of stakeholders, including local, national, and international governments, organizations, and institutions; survivors and civil society; and private organizations—business and industry (Waugh 2000, p. 4). Scholars have widely recognized networks as a form of multiorganizational governance, governing with and through organizations, institutions, and agencies through policies, funds, and regulations (Alter and Hage 1993; Brass et al. 2004; Huxham and Vangen 2005; Rhodes 2007). Network coordination and collaboration advantages in disaster and emergency management and climate action are considerable. These include enhanced learning, a more efficient use of resources and funding, increased capacity to plan for and address disaster events and climate-related impacts, and better community services and support. Shared goals and responsibilities and coordinated and unified actions produce a concerted effort to manage the effects of disasters and climate change. Therefore, anthropological research of small island research can consider how climate actions and disaster management networks are "collaborative by nature" (Kapucu and Garayev 2013, p. 315).

Kamensky et al. (2004, p. 8) define collaboration as the process in which "people from different organizations produce something together through joint effort, resources, and decision making, and share ownership of the final product or service". Within the collaborative network of disaster managers and climate specialists, the involvement of these

multiple stakeholders requires horizontal and vertical communication and coordination to create, implement, and maintain disaster initiatives and programs (Kapucu et al. 2010) (See Figure 1). Due to the nature of a network environment, Kapucu (2012, p. 51) posits that there is no single decision-maker, as decisions are made by several actors. However, anthropologists and other social scientists may challenge this assertion, considering the influence of power dynamics, privilege, and foreign interests on small islands, particularly from the Global North. The single "actor" may be an international body that dictates priorities for a nation in a peripheral position in the global economy. An example of this is Haiti.



Figure 1. A hurricane simulation in Haiti with the Haitian Civil Protection Agency, the Disaster Risk Management and Reconstruction Project for Haiti (PRGRD), and the World Bank. Photo taken at Cap-Haitien, Haiti by author (2013).

Recognized as a "fragile" state due to its weak socio-economic and political infrastructure, Haiti is a site for international involvement and aid. In this context, foreign actors have become leaders in major decision-making, which some Haitians see as a violation of state sovereignty. Foreign involvement not only has the potential to erode the legitimacy of the Haitian State but may also inadvertently disincentivize and discourage local authorities from actively pursuing initiatives aligned with national interests. Ethnography can interrogate if and how foreign countries, transnational organizations, and international institutions operate in and with small island nations. Organizations and institutions are what Haitian anthropologist Michel Rolph-Trouillot (2001, p. 132) notes as "the most obvious cases begging for an ethnography of state effects". Therefore, we can consider a Foucauldian perspective that "power is everywhere" (Foucault 1998, p. 63), even in global risk reduction structures and climate discourse. With funding and the capacity to develop and create projects, international organizations can prioritize certain strategies for specific regions and populations in Haiti—which circumvents the interests of local and national authorities. Thus, investigating the authority, functions, and roles of institutions and organizations can provide a lens on how these actors produce, perpetuate, and enforce cultures of collaboration, authority, and bureaucracy in disaster and emergency management and climate action.

4. Island Planning, Actions, and Collaborations

Globally, small islands face the highest frequency of disasters, including severe flooding and tropical storms (United Nations 2022). Victoria Keener et al. (2018, p. 27) highlight various factors, including an island's geography, the proximity of critical infrastructure to

the coast, governance structure, cultural practices, and access to funding may affect small island states' level of and approach to disaster and climate risk. Small island nations have proactively planned to consider future threats and impacts by developing and implementing risk reduction and preparedness activities. In disaster and emergency management, mitigation involves risk reduction actions taken before, during, and after a natural hazard event to minimize its impacts (Rosenfeld et al. 2005, p. 148). Disaster mitigation strategies include mobilizing communication services, constructing dams, building codes, land use policies, rehabilitation services, and creating early warning systems. Effective management of climate risks and disaster vulnerabilities demands incorporating diverse strategies and efforts to support communities comprehensively.

Risk reduction efforts happen through individual action and on an intergovernmental, national, regional, or community level. During my fieldwork in Haiti, I observed such initiatives along the roadways of Haitian mountaintops (Figure 2), where vetiver grass, a practical and cost-efficient plant, provides various risk reduction benefits. Haiti stands as one of the world's leading producers of vetiver oil, a valuable product derived from the aromatic essential oil of the plant, making it widely known and available in the country. Originally native to India, vetiver grass can serve multiple purposes, including stabilizing hedges, protecting infrastructure such as irrigation canals, drains, and road systems, conserving water and soil moisture, providing slope protection and flood control, and preventing/reducing soil erosion. It is characterized by its drought-resistant nature, resilience when subjected to foot traffic, and low maintenance requirements (National Research Council 1993). Between 2009 and 2015, a USD 127 million Watershed Initiative for National Natural Environmental Resources (WINNER) project resulted in over 4.4 million vetiver plants installed in Haiti (Chemonics International Inc. 2014; Social Impact 2015). This initiative highlighted the significance of international partnerships and community investment in ravine treatment, soil conservation, agricultural support, and food security.



Figure 2. Vetiver grass in Milot, Haiti. Photo by author (2010).

Despite environmental challenges, island nations pursue and implement diverse projects and initiatives in risk reduction. Various stakeholders, national governments, and organizations have prioritized disaster mitigation and climate adaptation objectives to reduce island vulnerabilities and risks. On a federal level, for example, Fiji's National Adaptation Plan (2018–2023) prioritizes 160 adaptation measures across ten areas to ad-

dress climate risks. Its National Climate Change Policy guidance further emphasizes the commitment to intergovernmental, multi-stakeholder, cross-sectoral, and society-wide accountability, collaboration, and responsibility for climate risk management and environmental protection (Ministry of Economy, Republic of Fiji 2018). Regionally, small island nations collaborate efforts in regional and intergovernmental organizations, including the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS), the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), the Global Islands Network, the Indian Ocean Commission, and the Pacific Islands Forum.

In the following sections, I spotlight various publicly accessible national policies, federal plans, and intergovernmental initiatives pursued across the three geographic regions of SIDS. This essay does not attempt to evaluate the efficiency of risk reduction strategies developed and implemented by island states. Instead, I provide readers with a brief review for several reasons.

First, learning about island nations' disaster management and climate efforts provides a baseline awareness of existing initiatives and planning strategies. This awareness can contextualize anthropological research within a broader framework of ongoing efforts, facilitating more informed analyses and interpretations of various concepts and experiences. Secondly, understanding the partnerships undertaken by small island nations helps us identify what actions and collaborations currently exist and may be implemented in the future. These partnerships can help us engage with relevant stakeholders and consider what initiatives and resources, including disaster mitigation grants and climate financing, may be promised for future implementation.

Thirdly, with the knowledge of disaster planning and climate implementation strategies, anthropologists and other social scientists can contribute to research activities that support ongoing island resilience and sustainability efforts. Researchers can anticipate emerging policy trends and interventions by studying various risk reduction approaches adopted by island nations. In sum, having more inclusive knowledge of the aspirations and challenges of island communities can ensure that anthropological research and fieldwork activities are conducted in a manner that respects and privileges local insights, regional expertise, and policy priorities.

4.1. Atlantic, Indian Ocean, and South China Sea Region

While research on climate adaptation and risks in the AIS region remains limited and understudied (Mills and Hancock 2005; Robinson 2020), intergovernmental initiatives and programs have opened avenues for climate action and collaboration. The Green Climate Fund (GCF), a multilateral fund that supports climate action in developing countries, has supported climate adaptation and mitigation initiatives in small island nations. In March 2021, the GCF approved an adaptation project proposal titled "Building Regional Resilience through Strengthened Meteorological, Hydrological and Climate Services in the Indian Ocean Commission Member Countries". This initiative, estimated to be completed by October 2027, supports the southwest Indian Ocean islands of Comoros, Madagascar, Mauritius, and Seychelles in risk management and provides climate-related products and services, including regional- and national-level early warning systems, to enhance climate resilience (Green Climate Fund 2021). This project is an example of a multinational collaboration and regional coordination to support community resilience, promote climate knowledge sharing, and strengthen critical infrastructure and systems.

Countries in the AIS region have devised comprehensive guidance and frameworks to implement climate action. To approach climate change, the Republic of Maldives' Climate Change Policy Framework outlines the nation's seven guiding principles: climate leadership, intergenerational equitability, mainstreaming climate change, honoring international commitments, fostering multilateral partnerships, facilitating technology transfer, and promoting climate resilience (Ministry of Environment and Energy 2015, p. 17–18). The Maldives envision strong multilevel and intergovernmental coordination, relevant policy initiatives, and joint planning by task forces to meet their climate action objectives.

Guinea-Bissau of West Africa, where nearly 80 percent of the population resides along the coastline, faces severe risks from coastal erosion, rising sea levels, and flooding (United Nations 2021). The country's 2015–2025 National Strategic Plan, *Terra Ranka* ("Fresh Start"), outlines policy priorities for sustainable development. Among these priorities is a strategic focus on biodiversity, with specific areas dedicated to the knowledge and surveillance of natural resources, the management of protected areas, the preservation of ecosystems, and developing and implementing a Climate Plan (Republic of Guinea-Bissau 2015). This robust plan guidance complements Guinea-Bissau's broader vision of a climate-resilient nation and national requirement for economic and social development (Republic of Guinea-Bissau 2021).

As a wealthy small island nation, Singapore is well positioned to formulate targeted risk reduction initiatives to bolster resilience and effectively manage disaster and climate-related risks. In 2019, Singapore inaugurated its USD 2 billion Green Investments Program to finance environmentally sustainable projects and mitigation initiatives (Monetary Authority of Singapore 2019). In 2021, the country launched its Green Plan, a robust strategic program to advance its national sustainable development agenda. The country's Climate Action Plan details a variety of completed mitigation and adaptation activities, e.g., building geo-bags and seawalls for coastal protection, increased patrols in fire hot spots, creating a water conservation program and water efficiency scheme, promoting workplace safety and health guidelines to manage heat stress, and implementing periodic structural inspection (Ministry of the Environment and Water Resources and Ministry of National Development 2016). Although facing alternative energy diversification challenges due to geographic constraints, Singapore announced in 2022 that it plans to raise its climate ambition to reach net zero by or around 2050.

4.2. Caribbean Region

Caribbean small island states have proactively embraced risk reduction measures, fostering collaborations and partnerships with regional governments to enhance capacity and capabilities. During the Summit of the Americas in June 2022, the Biden–Harris Administration launched the US–Caribbean Partnership to Address the Climate Crisis 2030 (U.S. Department of State n.d) to bolster climate resilience and energy security across the Caribbean region. Four pillars guide this initiative: improving access to development financing, facilitating clean energy project development and investment, enhancing local capacity building and food security, and deepening collaboration with Caribbean partners. Projects under PACC 2030 include finance and technical support for Barbados to establish the first green bank in the Caribbean, geothermal development in Dominica, support for developing and strengthening Caribbean disaster management policies, and targeted high-level government meetings on climate change (U.S. Department of State n.d.).

The Caribbean Community Climate Change Centre (CCCCC) and the Caribbean Institute for Meteorology and Hydrology (CIMH) are two regional entities focused on risk management. Headquartered in Belize and mandated by CARICOM, the CCCCC coordinates the Caribbean's response to climate change and serves as the principal repository for regional and national information on climate change (Caribbean Community Climate Change Centre 2021). As a member of the Green Climate Fund, the CCCCC can scale up climate action efforts and continue its projects and initiatives on risk management planning, climate literacy and awareness, critical infrastructure, forecasting and warning systems, and health care facilities in the Caribbean. Based in Barbados, the CIMH is a training and research organization focused on developing and improving meteorology and hydrology services and providing awareness and advice on the benefits of these services for the economic and environmental well-being of CIMH member states. CIMH is an institution of CARICOM, an affiliate of the University of the West Indies, and the technical arm of the Caribbean Meteorological Organization, a U.N. World Meteorological Organization member. Building and establishing partnerships with centers and institutes can facilitate major grant applications for international and inter-regional research, multi-

institutional collaborations, disaster and climate education, and community and student workforce development.

As non-members of CARICOM, the U.S. Caribbean islands of Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands may be excluded from broader Caribbean-wide initiatives focused on risk management, coastal resource conservation, and the resilience and security of island communities (NOAA Carib 2012). As Gould et al. (2018, p. 20) highlighted, the government of Puerto Rico has taken a proactive step by establishing a memorandum of understanding with the Caribbean Community Climate Change Centre (CCCCC) to collaboratively address risk reduction initiatives. Thus, opportunities exist for the U.S. Caribbean region to actively cultivate partnerships and foster relationships with Caribbean entities, facilitating joint efforts in climate action and disaster risk reduction.

4.3. Pacific Island Region

The concerns about the frequency and severity of disasters and climate-related events have also shaped national planning and stakeholder engagement of the Pacific Islands. Kiribati, an island country in the central Pacific Ocean, experiences disaster and climate risks due to sea level rise, increased ocean acidification, extreme weather events, increased temperatures, and changes in precipitation patterns (Pacific-Australia Climate Change Science and Adaptation Planning 2015). In 2021, global fossil carbon dioxide emissions reached 37.9 gigatons, with Kiribati responsible for only 0.000075 gigatons (Crippa et al. 2022). Without targeted and ambitious international action, climate change threatens the communities and cultures of Kiribati (World Health Organization 2018). Kiribati developed its 2014–2023 Joint Implementation Plan to address disaster vulnerability and climate-related risks. This guidance integrates risk reduction strategies using an integrative approach that incorporates the cooperation of the government, civil society, and the private sector (Government of Kiribati 2014).

Various regional efforts and programs have been adopted to support communities and populations across the Pacific Islands. Established in 1993, the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP) is an intergovernmental organization based in Samoa with policy priorities on climate change resilience, natural resource management, and environmental issues of Pacific SIDS. SPREP received accreditation to the Green Climate Fund (GCF), which allows the organization to apply for funds and resources to support Pacific SIDS-focused adaptation and migration projects and programming. For example, with implementation support from SPREP, the Republic of Nauru received GCF funding to strengthen its planning initiatives on adaptation governance, institutional coordination, and stakeholder engagement (GCF 2022).

Pacific leadership has supported regional strategic frameworks to address the impacts of climate change and disasters on the region (Asian Development Bank 2013). Notably, SPREP and the Pacific Island Forum Leaders approved the Pacific Islands Framework for Action on Climate Change 2006–2015, which aimed to implement risk reduction measures and assist island states in securing sustainable resources to address climate change risks and impacts (SPREP 2011).

Additionally, the leaders of the Pacific Island Forum endorsed the 2005–2015 Pacific Disaster Risk Reduction and Disaster Management Framework for Action, aiming to build climate-resilient communities, enhance good governance, and strengthen partnerships across governments, civil society, communities, and other stakeholders (Pacific Community 2005). In 2013, the Pacific Islands Forum adopted the Majuro Declaration to promote climate leadership and commit to renewable, clean, and sustainable energy sources for small developing countries in the Pacific. George Carter (2015) explained that Pacific leaders mobilized to form coalitions, creating the Coalition of Atoll Nations on Climate Change (CANCC) and the Pacific SIDS group. These coalitions have emerged as significant blocs to participate in the global dialogue on climate change and disaster vulnerabilities, establish intergovernmental partnerships, and enhance climate leadership.

5. Discussion on Advocacy

Given their heightened vulnerability to climate-related events, small island states are pivotal in promoting justice and actively engaging in action (Thomas et al. 2020). Under the Paris Agreement, countries formulated ambitious Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) outlining their national climate pledges. SIDS have articulated national climate change adaptation policies and plans per the guidance of the U.N. Framework Convention on Climate Change. These plans and policies serve as blueprints to enhance national capacity and resilience. However, SIDS encounter challenges in implementing proposed climate actions, goals, and targets and realizing their vision of reducing vulnerabilities and risk. Limitations in climate funding, private sector investments, technical support, human capital, risk assessments, and institutional capacity may impede risk planning processes. Consequently, fulfilling NDC commitments may necessitate additional technical or capacity support, financial and investment planning, and strengthened coordination and stakeholder engagement (Keo and Jo 2022). Therefore, climate equity and global action require multilateral accountability, transparency, commitment, and collaboration.

At the heart of climate equity debates and negotiations are groups like the AOSIS, an intergovernmental coalition comprising small island and low-lying coastal countries facing similar development challenges and environmental concerns. This group has led climate action efforts, including playing a pivotal role at the 21st Conference of the Parties, or COP21, in 2015. This involvement influenced essential elements of the Paris Agreement, securing the recognition of SIDS' special status and needs. In addition, the AOSIS advocated for an ambitious temperature target for global emission reduction and successfully attained a dedicated article on loss and damage (Ourbak and Magnan 2018). Sam Adelman (2016, p. 58) argues, "The demands of climate justice require international protection for people forcibly displaced by climate change and compensation for the physical, psychological and cultural harms that result".

At the COP28 climate talks in Dubai, one of the coalition's long-standing efforts materialized by establishing a loss and damage response fund for developing nations. However, following the conclusion of COP28, the AOSIS's lead negotiator, Anne Rasmussen of Samoa, shared her disappointment and confusion regarding the final agreement (United Nations 2023). She highlighted that the consensus was approved without representatives from small island nations. Rasmussen (AOSIS 2023) specifically criticized several sections of the agreement, pointing out that a particular section on energy contains "...a litany of loopholes. It does not deliver on a subsidy phaseout, and it does not advance us beyond the status quo". Despite the setbacks, the AOSIS remains a champion for climate action that effectively mitigates emissions, reduces risks, and equitably distributes benefits among small island states and low-lying coastal countries.

The clarion call for enhanced global cooperation and equitable strategies emphasizes the critical importance of robust disaster risk reduction and climate policy initiatives specifically tailored to confront the unique disaster vulnerabilities and climate risks of island nations. Anthropological research can zoom in on targeted and contextually relevant strategies to explore the transferability of practices from one island to another. For example, exploring risk reduction initiatives in Fiji could offer insights applicable to the Bahamas. Therefore, a comparative analysis of adaptable and scalable solutions may help foster collaborative and globally applicable approaches to disaster management and climate resilience. Also, supporting multilevel, cross-sectoral, and critically collaborative initiatives indicates an orientation and priority towards reciprocal research and resource exchange in disaster anthropology and climate ethnography.

Alternatively, it is important to acknowledge that the challenges of conducting anthropological research cannot be understated. These challenges include the generous time investment required, struggles in data collection, the complexity of selecting and establishing field sites, the necessity of building and maintaining relationships, the difficulties of navigating positionality, and the obstacles in accessing cultural spaces, places, and people. Multi-sited research faces these same challenges. Sarah Van Duijn (2020, p. 292) outlines

that holism is unattainable in multi-sited research because "there [is] no whole to be found or followed, only a plethora of perspectives across sites, which may or may not align". Thus, anthropologists studying in and with small island nations can use multi-sited ethnographic data to navigate the uncertainties of climate change and explore the nuances, complexities, and diversity of disaster experiences across space, place, and time.

Falzon (2009, p. 2) reminds us, multi-sited ethnography, as a method, "involves a spatially dispersed field through which the ethnographer moves—actually, via sojourns in two or more places, or conceptually, by means of techniques of juxtaposition of data". We can consider Peter Sutoris's (2021, p. 319) multi-sited ethnography on participatory videomaking with children in India and South Africa, which aimed to "produce data across the two sites that could speak to each other, thereby enabling a meaningful comparative approach to my research agenda". McAdam-Otto and Nimfuhr's (2021) study on forced migration in Malta illustrates that multi-sited research does not necessarily require crossing national boundaries. Therefore, fieldwork may be conducted in "un-participated sites" or locations that researchers cannot physically access due to changing life circumstances (e.g., political conflict, natural hazards, and COVID-19). In sum, disaster anthropology and climate ethnography research do not need to be fixed to a particular geography or, in this case, one specific island, coast, or region. Instead, anthropologists can consider multi-sited research as an opportunity to explore various spatial arrangements of place, people, things, and ideas related to island vulnerabilities, disasters, and climate policy.

6. Considerations on Island Research

Anthropological research invites critical theories and inclusive methodological tools to capture qualitative insights that complement the quantitative data. Recognizing the human complexity of disasters and climate crises helps us to make interventions in our theory and practice of engagement. These interventions are informed and framed by decolonial theory and inclusive pedagogical approaches such as Black and transnational feminist epistemologies, critical race theory, queer and crip theory, and indigenous and local knowledge. These approaches promote justice and equity and serve as tools to foster advocacy and policy work efforts.

To support the methodological imperative of participatory approaches, it is essential to actively engage with questions that advance our knowledge of the socio-cultural and political dimensions of disaster vulnerability, climate risk, and community resilience of small island states. Building from Felima (2024a), below are discussion questions that serve as starting points to guide conversations on disaster risks, vulnerability, and climate action. This list is not exhaustive but offers potential ideas for future discussions for workshop activities and training for researchers, scholars, and practitioners. Similarly, these questions can be discussion prompts for students in social science courses on disasters and climate change. With each question, I encourage scholars to think through how anthropology, ethnography, and transdisciplinary processes can help us interrogate the intersections of culture, disasters, and climate change in small island nations.

Discussion Questions and Facilitation Prompts

- What are the connections between disaster management, global emissions reduction, environmental sustainability, and national climate change adaptation?
- In what ways do disasters, climate change, and crises further exacerbate risks, vulnerabilities, and inequalities in small island nations? How do specific populations and communities such as women, children, older adults, people with disabilities, and the unhoused bear the brunt of these impacts?
- How will the increasing frequency and intensity of hazards reshape how stakeholders design, develop, and implement innovative and effective risk reduction strategies?
- What political and economic gaps hinder effective disaster preparedness and climate finance in small island nations, and how can these barriers be addressed to promote meaningful progress? Also, what could anthropological research on loss

and damage reveal about the impacts on the development and sustainability of small island nations?

- What can anthropology offer in examining climate diasporas, dispossession, displacement, and migration patterns? Why does researching "climate refugees,"[4] "forced climate migrants," and "environmentally displaced people" require an ethics of care?
- What roles do scholars, students, and researchers play in advancing and advocating for disaster preparedness and climate action for small island nations? Importantly, what equity concerns should social scientists and practitioners consider in researching, writing, and working with island groups and communities?
- What theories and approaches apply to studying island risk and vulnerability? Are concepts such as political economy, political ecology, feminist political ecology, racial capitalism, and Black ecology[5] helpful in our analyses? Do planetary eras and effects of the Anthropocene, Plantationocene, Capitalocene, and Racial Capitalocene[6] enrich or hinder our thinking? What are the benefits and limitations of bridging theoretical abstractions to climate science to consider disaster risks, climate change, and preparedness?
- What specific roles should intergovernmental forums such as G20 member countries, which contribute to 80 percent of global greenhouse gas emissions, play in shaping and implementing international climate policy, particularly as it relates to small island nations? Also, how do geo-political and economic interests shape foreign policy cooperation in risk reduction?
- What are the benefits of regional partnerships and collaboration in disaster risk management and climate adaptation efforts? What challenges do these island coalitions face while working together?
- Which governments, agencies, and organizations demonstrate successful models in fostering climate literacy and enhancing individual disaster readiness in small island nations? What specific practices and sustainable investment initiatives promote resilient critical infrastructures?
- How can citizens and governments collaboratively leverage multilevel support and multigenerational leadership to foster synergy, effectively reduce disaster risks, and support risk reduction policy in small island nations?
- Furthermore, how can governments and organizations empower, mobilize, and invest in island communities to actively participate in risk reduction efforts and contribute meaningfully to climate policy initiatives?
- What relevant qualitative tools, methodologies, training, and ethical principles are required to research communities and populations experiencing the impacts of disasters and climate change? Are these tools, methods, and perspectives applicable and transferrable to all islands? What are the limitations?

7. Towards Resilient Island Futures

Disasters and climate-related events, including tropical storms and hurricanes, droughts, coastal erosion, and ocean acidification, threaten small island communities. These potential disaster events will prompt social scientists to research in small island communities. Where there are issues, there are researchers.[7] Therefore, I invite emerging anthropologists and ethnographers to be committed to conducting applied and community-oriented work that centers decolonial theories, inclusive methodologies, participatory approaches, and global climate equity in their analyses.

Anthropology can serve as a transformative vehicle in critical disaster studies and climate research, potentially fostering meaningful partnerships and collaborations between researchers, practitioners, and island communities. By emphasizing a research ethic that privileges local insights, community investment and collaborations, and participatory approaches, anthropologists can contribute to projects that speak to various experiences of groups affected by disasters and climate-related events. This potential lies in the reciprocal

relationship between researchers and communities, creating a pathway towards sustainable and impactful disaster studies prioritizing the voices and efforts of those most affected.

Topics on disasters, ecological crises, climate action, and the future of small island nations must speak to the importance of shaping and implementing effective policies and responses to small island disaster risks. A nuanced understanding of island regional differences in climate impacts offers insights into environmental sustainability, developmental discourse, and multilevel action through scholarship, research, outreach, and advocacy. Research, partnerships, and policy considerations allow us to tailor risk reduction strategies to address the specific challenges faced by each small island nation.

Importantly, researchers and academics can be critical in their discussions on small island risk by exploring and expanding interconnected themes such as environmental justice, local and indigenous knowledge, global equity, eco-feminism, dispossession, indigenous environmental movements, youth engagement, structural inequalities, climate justice, food sovereignty, and land grabbing. I posit that anthropology is well equipped to survey the cultural impacts and considerations in the context of climate issues, bringing a human dimension to policy discussions and action. This type of applied work encourages the development of more sensitive and equitable responses to the disaster and climate impacts of small island communities. As anthropologists continue to navigate the dynamic challenges posed by environmental crises, utilizing diverse methodological approaches and transdisciplinary perspectives will be crucial in informing policy, guiding interventions, and promoting resilience in small island nations and beyond.

Climate change introduces unprecedented disaster risks to regions and populations worldwide. With the anticipated trends of the increased frequency and intensity of climate and weather-related events, new challenges to communities and our natural environments will emerge. Urban, rural, and coastal landscapes will undergo cultural and environmental transformations influenced by population growth, human activities, and heightened resource demands. While societies have historically adapted to environmental stresses, the impacts of future hazards and climate changes are expected to fall disproportionately on low- and medium-developed countries and marginalized communities. Therefore, urgent priorities include disaster risk reduction, climate equity, and multi-governmental cooperation. With small island developing nations at the forefront of climate action, I charge disaster anthropologists and climate ethnographers to think radically in our approaches to explore new scholarly questions, policy initiatives, inter-regional collaborations, and grassroots partnerships for a more resilient island future.

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Notes

[1] This article is an expanded version of an encyclopedia entry on small island states by the author (Felima 2024b) in the Elgar Encyclopedia of Climate Policy edited by Daniel J. Fiorino, Todd A. Eisenstadt, and Manjyot Kaur Ahluwalia. The publisher has granted permission for this expanded version.

[2] For an updated list of Small Island Developing States (SIDS), please refer to the official United Nations website at https://www.un.org/ohrlls/content/list-sids (accessed on 10 December 2023).

[3] The Saffir–Simpson Hurricane Wind Scale is used to classify hurricanes based on their sustained wind speeds. A Category 5 hurricane is the highest category, with sustained wind speeds of 157 miles per hour or higher. The associated damage is catastrophic. More information about the Saffir–Simpson Hurricane Wind Scale can be found at the National Hurricane Center at https://www.nhc.noaa.gov/aboutsshws.php (accessed on 9 January 2024).

[4] The term "climate refugee" is used to characterize a person who is forced to leave their country due to the impact of climate change. Scholars have highlighted fundamental conflicts and issues with the term "climate refugee". Using Tuvalu in the Pacific as a case study, Farbotko and Lazrus (2012) argued that the term can perpetuate inequitable power relations, stripping communities of their agency. Dreher and Voyer (2015) and Hingley (2017) further write that the term is insensitive, counterproductive, and misrepresented in the Pacific context. Please read these authors for more information and contextualization of the term's usage.

[5] To study the relationships between power, economy, society, race, gender, and the environment, cultural anthropologists and other researchers and scholars employ various theories such as political economy (Jones and Murphy 2009), political ecology (Perreault et al. 2015), feminist political ecology (Rocheleau et al. 1996), racial capitalism (Robinson [1983] 2000), and Black ecology (Hosbey et al. 2022). While this list does not encompass all theoretical perspectives relevant to disaster anthropology and environmental humanities, it is a starting point for engagement and discussion.

[6] Concepts such as the Anthropocene, Plantationocene, Capitalocene, and Racial Capitalocene are explored in cultural anthropology, geography, and environmental humanities. Readings by Janae Davis et al. (2019), Donna Haraway (2015), Jason W. Moore (2017), Anna Tsing (2015), and Françoise Vergès (2017) can further help us think through these systems of extraction and exploitation, power dynamics, racialization, and environmental degradation.

[7] Based on my work and experience following the January 2010 earthquake in Haiti, I learned that the influx of researchers studying and collecting data from Haiti became a concern for Haitians who were treated as "extractive points". Communities, particularly underserved, underresourced, and underrepresented, may be subjected to data collection practices that disregard individual and community consent, well-being, and impact. The exploitative aspect of such interactions arises when the primary research focuses on extracting information or resources rather than engaging with the individuals as active, consenting participants and collaborators. In such cases, research becomes exploitative and harmful.

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