



Researcher: Sara Penrhyn Jones

Project Title: Troubled Waters: heritage in times of accelerated climate change

UoA: 14 – Geography and Environmental Studies

Research Statement

The research film *Troubled Waters* (Penrhyn Jones, 2015) explores the multi-layered concept of heritage, in times of accelerated climate change. The film achieves this by investigating and articulating perspectives from the low-lying island nation Kiribati, which faces an existential threat from climate change. It explores how heritage, tangible and intangible, is at stake when mass displacement is predicted in future. This film, winning two AHRC nominations for Best Research Film in 2015, was both a key component, and a driver of a larger, collaborative body of research. Together with its associated resources and outputs, *Troubled Waters* (re)frames climate change as inextricably connected to place, heritage and identity. Consequently, it argues that climate change, although a global challenge, demands locally and culturally specific understanding and response (Penrhyn Jones, 2019). In the broadest sense, this evolving project showcases the value of the arts and humanities in addressing climate change, in two key ways: by embodying the power of the creative arts to stimulate and humanise our most important debates; by utilising a humanities concept, heritage, to reveal a more nuanced sense of what is at stake for distinct communities, in order to better support climate adaptation.

This body of research was directly supported by the AHRC, through two funded research projects and one impact project, led by Sara Penrhyn Jones, 2015-18. Whereas Penrhyn Jones is situated within Film and Media studies, other co-investigators were scholars from the field of heritage, and initially, the environmental humanities. Project partners and collaborators included cultural and heritage organisations, such as the National Library of Wales, and the Cornish Audio Visual Archive, who wanted to explore the role that they may have in curating heritage from climate-vulnerable locations. Other partners, the National Trust, and the International National Trusts Organisation, shared an interest in promoting cultural heritage as a more prominent consideration in climate change discourse. Both these organisations have subsequently used the *Troubled Waters* film in their educational and advocacy roles.

Early investigation ('Troubled Waters', 2015-16) focused on three distinct sites, in north Wales, Cornwall and Kiribati, selected through discussion with project partners, the National Trust. Research questions included finding out how communities experienced concrete and abstract effects from climate change, and how they perceived, and responded to, the prospect of future disruption. There were also consideration given to how the arts and humanities might make a positive difference, and a sensitivity to the type of narratives that might be told about climate change, and by whom.

Both the second research project, 'Enduring Connections' (2016-18), and the follow-on impact project, 'Troubled Waters, Reaching Out' (2018), shifted focus to the most urgent case study, Kiribati. Earlier findings, which were shared in a funded case-study report for the AHRC/ESRC initiative, *Mobilising Indigenous Knowledge* (2018), written with collaborators in Kiribati, concluded: that the specific ancestral, indigenous relationship with land had to be understood in order to fully understand what was at stake; that the ocean is part of Kiribati territory, and a resource as well as a threat; that cultural heritage is not homogenous in Kiribati, and that there is a strong relationship between the living and the dead, which is a factor in planning for dealing with graves in a mass-displacement scenario. This report was presented by Sara Penrhyn Jones and Pelenise Alofa, KiriCAN, at an International Indigenous Research seminar in Rio De Janeiro in March 2019.

As a result of emerging research findings, there was a heightened commitment to developing a community's own capacity for ecological storytelling and action (Penrhyn Jones, 2019). Consequently, research methods enacted principles of participatory action research, and also reciprocity, which is important in Kiribati culture. The research team resourced the local, grassroots environmental organisation, KiriCAN to consult with local communities in Kiribati. These project partners then addressed their own environmental priorities, identified by local wards as waste, before purchasing trucks for rubbish collection. An artistic collaboration with indigenous artist and heritage expert, Natan Itonga, also led to a collaborative film, celebrating indigenous heritage and knowledge in the Kiribati language. Furthermore, the idea of a more equal, and less extractive research partnership was enacted by bringing Natan Itonga to visit seven museum collections, holding Kiribati artefacts, in the UK. This brought a sense of connection between Kiribati and its displaced heritage, and helped to further explore the potential role of heritage organisations in safeguarding objects which represent enduring connections, following displacement and associated trauma. These ideas are discussed in an academic article co-written by the academic investigators (Woodham et al, 2018).

Dissemination and engagement have been an intrinsic part of the Troubled Waters research portfolio. The film, and a customised shorter version, has been widely screened, including at the Museum of World Culture in Sweden (2017), and three UN Climate Change Conferences (2016, 2017, 2018). A range of resources, including short videos for the social media platform Twitter, reflecting

on the research, have been disseminated by the team. The project also used the Kiribati case study to lead a discussion of the role of heritage organisations in communicating climate change, at an event, 'We need to talk about Climate Change' workshop at the Manchester Museum with significant engagement by heritage organisations, in April 2017. The research has featured in the AHRC's selected portfolios of both environmental and heritage research. Penrhyn Jones' photography and article have featured in *Planet* magazine (2019).