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Stories in Pacific climate mobility research and policy

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Abstract

Climate mobility is a pressing issue for the Pacific region, where communities are disproportionately affected by global climate and environmental changes. Drawing on a scoping literature review, this article examines the scholarship concerning climate mobility and related issues in the Pacific region, eliciting that stories count in Pacific climate mobility scholarship and decision-making. This article argues that story-based approaches are especially valuable because they: (1) embrace cultural connectedness between land, sea and people; (2) draw on oral tradition strengths; (3) highlight resilience; (4) identify intangible and non-economic factors; (5) reveal evolving traditional knowledge and practices; (6) foster ownership of solutions; and (7) disrupt mobility injustice. By foregrounding Indigenous/Pacific epistemologies, relational values, and lived experience, this article shows how storytelling approaches can contribute actionable knowledge for more just and effective climate mobility policies and programmes.

Keywords: Storytelling; Pacific; Indigenous; climate change; mobility; immobility; non-economic loss.

Introduction

The culturally and linguistically hyper-diverse Pacific region, long navigated by the Indigenous peoples of the area, covers one-third of the globe and includes vast stretches of ocean understood as a "sea of islands" (Hau'ofa, 1994, p. 159). The rich history and diversity of the region eventually became intertwined with European colonisation and, in more recent decades, has been impacted by global climate and environmental changes, which have come to characterise much of the region. The contemporary climate crisis has stirred these diverse and complex histories, spurred new inquiries regarding mobilities and immobilities, and exacerbated existing global inequities (Sheller, 2023). In this context, governments, regional bodies, civil society, and scholars alike are seeking to understand current and future patterns, scales, and impacts of Pacific climate mobility (Burson et al., 2024).

Storying has potential as a tool to decolonise and transform relational spaces and speaks of not only geographic 'borderlands', but activation of the borderlands of thought and of relationships (Mafile'o et al., 2022). Stories then, in their many forms, provide critical insight to better understand the complexities of climate change in the Pacific region and on Pacific climate mobility (Cornish et al., 2022; Mafile'o et al., 2023; Yates et al., 2023). Yet, local stories of the lived experience of those most disproportionately impacted by the climate change forces necessitating them to navigate climate mobility, are under-represented in the research literature (Abbott & Wilson, 2014; Nunn et al., 2024).

Drawing on a scoping review of research literature concerning climate mobility and related issues in the Pacific region, this article explores why stories count in Pacific climate mobility scholarship and policy. The review finds that stories: (1) embrace cultural connectedness between land, sea and people; (2) draw on oral tradition strengths; (3) highlight resilience; (4) identify intangible and non-economic factors; (5) reveal knowledge in evolving traditional and local practices; (6) foster ownership of solutions; and (7) disrupt mobility injustice. Together, these themes show that story-based approaches can deepen interdisciplinary understanding of Pacific climate mobility while generating knowledge that is more culturally grounded, policy-relevant and attentive to justice.

This article contributes to interdisciplinary Pacific studies by bringing climate mobility scholarship into conversation with Indigenous Pacific epistemologies, policy studies, migration research and relational approaches to climate justice. Its central contribution is to show that story-based methods are not simply illustrative or supplementary but are necessary for producing policy-relevant knowledge that reflects Pacific peoples' lived realities, cultural obligations, mobility choices and continuing attachments to land, sea and kin.

Method

To locate literature for the scoping review, searches were conducted in Google Scholar, Discover and Scopus using combinations of the terms Pacific, climate mobility, climate immobility and climate change. Pacific nation names were also added to narrow searches to specific country

contexts, for example Tuvalu, Solomon Islands, Fiji and Vanuatu. The review prioritised literature that addressed climate-related mobility, immobility, relocation, adaptation, loss and damage, or Indigenous and local knowledge in Pacific contexts. Sources were included where they offered conceptual, empirical or policy-relevant insight into how Pacific peoples understand, experience or govern climate-related movement and staying. Literature outside the Pacific was used selectively where it clarified broader concepts such as non-economic loss and damage, relational values, mobility injustice or migration-as-adaptation debates. This approach enabled the review to identify recurring themes across disciplines while retaining a primary focus on Pacific climate mobility.

An annotated bibliography was produced from the initial literature sweep and analysed thematically. It included empirical studies, conceptual articles, policy reports, reviews, and Pacific-led research outputs on climate mobility, immobility, adaptation, non-economic loss and damage, Indigenous knowledge and storytelling. Thematic analysis identified recurring claims about the value of stories in Pacific climate mobility scholarship. The findings from this analysis are organised into the seven themes discussed below.

This review was initially conducted to inform a study of climate mobility in the Pacific (see Mafile'o, 2024; Mafile'o et al., 2024; Mafile'o et al., 2026), which contributed to a broader programme of Pacific climate mobility research synthesised and reported by Burson et al. (2024). The themes discussed below suggest that storytelling is an apt approach to knowledge development for policy and practice addressing Pacific climate mobility. This argument is further supported by two recent Pacific-led reports: the Pacific Ocean and Climate Crisis Assessment (POCCA) regional report, which brings together interdisciplinary evidence, Indigenous knowledge and community narratives across 16 Pacific Island Countries and Territories (POCCA, 2024), and the Rising Stories research, which uses multigenerational family stories to analyse circular, connected, collective and concrete forms of Pacific climate (im)mobility (Mafie'o, 2024; Mafile'o et al., 2024; Mafile'o, 2026).

Why stories count in Pacific climate mobility

Stories embrace cultural connectedness between land, sea and people

Connectedness between land, sea and people characterises climate mobility in the Pacific, and stories are well suited to capture these rich, complex inter-relationships. Pacific peoples are "often highly mobile while maintaining strong attachments to place" (Farbotko & McMichael, 2019, p. 150). Land – vanua, fenua, hanua, fanua, whenua – is "the ground of belonging, the locus of being, the means of livelihood and the nurturer of life" (Havea, 2007 p. 51). McMichael et al. (2021) show that place attachment, sociocultural continuity, land access, and protective infrastructures, all shape decisions to remain in or move from low-lying coastal places. They further highlight that:

> overlapping drivers of immobility and translocality in sites of coastal risk... [and the] need to move away from the binaries of immobility/mobility and of trapped/voluntarily immobile populations and to examine the multiplicities of human (im)mobility (McMichael et al., 2021, p. 82).

Adapting in place can protect Pacific peoples' ties to customary land as they "connect with traditional ways of life... [and] maintain connections to sites of belonging" (McMichael et al., 2021, p. 101). Perumal's in-depth study with ni-Vanuatu on belonging and place captures one community member's resolve, "for me, personally, I would say that I'm not going to move if there's a climate change event or impacts in my home. Because, you know, the place where I live is where I belong" (2018, p. 59). Yee et al. clarify that local residents "express place belongingness that is experienced through multiple domains, including the auto-biographical, ancestral and historic, relational, cultural, economic, and legal connections" (2022, p. 14). In these cases, perceived climate risks do not automatically precipitate mobility; staying may also secure identity, wellbeing and cultural continuity (Mafile'o, et al., 2024; McMichael et al., 2021).

Communities actively engaged in climate adaptation are reliant on the interconnectedness of social relationships for overall wellbeing and increasingly, the literature is recognising relational values in Indigenous/Pacific climate narratives (Boege, 2022; Burger et al., 2023; Clissold et al., 2023; Everuss, 2023; Mallick et al., 2023; Newport, 2019; Saddington, 2023; Sakdapolrak et al., 2023; Suliman et al., 2019; Vaai, 2019; Yates et al., 2023; Zickgraf, 2022). Prioritising relational values in adaptation strategies preserves social bonds and could mitigate the influence of political hegemony and socio-economic anxieties involved with climate related adaptation (Burger et al., 2023). Relational security comes from secure attachment to land, place and people, and its disruption through climate impacts or relocation can be experienced as non-visible violence (Boege, 2022). This can also be the case for relocated migrants, as Boege elaborates:

> relocation sites... can be perceived as also being 'uninhabitable' by those forced to relocate – because relocation negatively affects their place-based ontological, or relational, security, their culture and identity, or because their new neighbours in recipient communities harass and attack them (2022, p. 10).

Climate change and its impacts across the spectrum of mobility/immobility have the power to disrupt relational security among communities; something that should be considered in conceiving and implementing climate change initiatives and policies (Vaai, 2019). This reinforces the need for climate mobility policy to protect relationships between relocating and recipient communities. Climate mobility initiatives should therefore move beyond human-centred or individualised approaches and build relationships across households, kin-groups, places of origin, and destination. A translocal perspective is especially useful because migrants' livelihoods and households are often distributed across multiple places but remain part of a single social and functional unit (Boege, 2022; Sakdapolrak et al., 2023).

Pacific eco-relational spirituality has been identified as a critical foundation for shaping a new climate narrative. This perspective is explored in the work of Vaai, who argues that:

> Eco-relational spirituality understands the world and life as non-compartmentalised, that everything in life is multi-dimensional, distinct and different yet mutually and inextricably related. It is a spirituality shaped by the both/and philosophy as opposed to the either/or philosophy that underpins the compartmentalised way of thinking of the global north (2019, p. 9).

Indigenous terms from the Pacific region such as vanua, fenua, fanua, aba, whenua, have dual meanings referring both to people and to land, and "when they speak of the va or wa, it is a paradigm that outlines the security as well as harmony and balance that can be achieved only through respecting relational spaces" (Vaai, 2019, p. 9). Pacific cultures promote relational principles and values "such as sautu in Fiji, va or wa in many Polynesian cultures, fakaaloalo in Tuvalu, faka'apa'apa in Tonga, piri'anga in Niue, thalaba in Kanaki New Caledonia, and gudpela sindaum in Papua New Guinea, to name a few" (Vaai, 2019. p. 9).

Traditional cultural practices contribute to, and inform, the adaptive capacity of local communities responding to climate change (Albert et al., 2018; McMillen et al., 2014). It has been observed that the relocation and adaptation capacity of a community in response to a climate catastrophe is influenced by customs relating to land tenure, kinship, and lineage (Albert et al., 2018; Lauer et al., 2013). The villages of Nuatambu and Nusa Hope, part of a Solomon Islands case study, demonstrate that social organisation and kinship ties among community can influence (im)mobility:

> An individual's level of knowledge of genealogy, kastom (traditional) stories and historical movements will dictate their ability to negotiate and consolidate their ability to relocate to and access resources in new areas. This process to secure land tenure over relocation sites would typically be conducted slowly over a period of years to allow consensus building amongst all stakeholders (Albert et al., 2018, p. 2270).

Ties to land will often "focus on relationships that define the complex interdependence between the natural environment, social and cultural systems, and institutions that determine daily well-being" (Warrick et al., 2017, p. 1048) including social capital, community relationships, and traditional governance systems. Both the POCCA report and Rising Stories research reinforce that mobility decisions are shaped by oceanic relationality, customary governance, genealogy, burial grounds, faith, kinship obligations, land tenure, and continuing attachment to island homes (Mafile'o et al., 2024; POCCA, 2024).

To fully account for the deep relationality and interconnectedness characteristic of Pacific worldviews, research informing climate mobility policy and action must be interdisciplinary, utilise multiple methods, and embrace diverse ways of knowing. Storytelling approaches provide rich insights into the connectedness between land, sea and people central to Pacific experiences of climate change and climate mobility. Furthermore, storytelling draws on a long legacy of oral tradition within the region, a discussion taken up in the next section.

Stories draw on oral tradition strengths

Pacific-Indigenous cultures encapsulate knowledge in oral narratives (Alsford, 2022; Janif et al., 2016; McNamara et al., 2021b; Pasisi, 2020). These oral stories reveal Pacific peoples' resilience and adaptive capacities to endure climate extremes. This being the case, research methodologies centred in Indigenous/Pacific-indigenous worldviews strengthen Indigenous communities facing risk, but also the wider global community (Boege, 2022; Clissold et al., 2023; Dyer & Neef, 2023; Havea, 2014; Newport, 2019; Pasisi, 2020; Yates et al., 2022b; Yates et al., 2023). Approaches grounded

in Pacific-Indigenous oral traditions create unique and empowering resources for understanding Pacific climate mobility (Alsford, 2022; Ayeb-Karlsson et al., 2021; Suliman et al., 2019).

Pacific research methodologies, including kakala (Thaman, 1997) and talanoa (Vaioleti, 2006), alongside conceptual frameworks such as the vaka moana (double-hulled voyaging canoe) (Newport, 2019) and hiapo (Niue bark cloth) (Pasisi, 2020), are increasingly being employed to strengthen and elevate Pacific scholarship. Other Pacific-centred frameworks have been expressed though visual and performance artworks (Steiner, 2015; Clissold, 2023). Steiner examined 350 Pacific's Pacific Warrior Campaign conveying that "while many representations of Pacific Island communities affected by climate change emphasise helplessness, Pacific Islanders have been negotiating identities of empowerment and resilience in both political and cultural arenas" (2015, p. 180). Clissold et al. (2023) studied the art of participants which have "foregrounded climate justice, human rights, and the desire for self-determination in Pacific climate experiences (2023, p. 12).

Pacific climate initiatives that use Pacific frameworks and local languages can inform both macro policy and micro community action (Alsford, 2022; Durand-Delacre et al., 2021; Havea, 2014; Havea et al., 2020; Tiatia-Seath et al., 2020; Yates et al., 2022b). Yet Pacific-authored work on Indigenous intellectual traditions remains limited. Working with local communities with the intention of gathering local knowledge and perspectives on various climate issues and (im) mobilities can avoid homogenous classification and treatment of island states impacted by climate change in research literature (Petzold et al., 2023). Nuancing these different categories of research highlights epistemological and methodological contributions sourced within Pacific-Indigenous oral traditions. Stories, therefore, as ways of knowing drawing on oral traditions, contribute diverse perspectives in climate mobility scholarship.

Sanga and Reynolds' (2022) distinction between research about, for, centred on, and grounded in Solomon Islands knowledge is useful beyond that context because it highlights the epistemological contribution of Pacific-Indigenous oral traditions. Rising Stories provides a contemporary Pacific-led example. Through talanoa, tok stori, te maroro, faitalaga, poetic inquiry and digital storytelling, it shows how family and kin-group narratives generate culturally grounded evidence while asserting Pacific epistemic authority (Mafile'o et al., 2024). The persistence of Pacific oral traditions reflects both the diversity and resilience of these traditions.

Stories reveal Pacific resilience

Local stories provide an important counter-narrative because Pacific nations at the forefront of climate change are too often represented primarily through vulnerability and risk in reports, research literature and social media. The literature also includes examples of Pacific-Indigenous peoples as resilient communities with high levels of inherent adaptive capacity, particularly where local story approaches are engaged (Latai-Niusulu et al., 2020; Farbotko & McMichael, 2019; Warrick et al., 2017; McMillen et al., 2014). Indicators of community resilience are linked to strong local leadership, social organisation, and social networks (Warrick et al., 2017; McMillen et al., 2014), which help cultivate decision-making, resource distribution and collective motivation for daily living and wellbeing.

The under-representation of local stories is linked to wider gaps in research on Pacific resilience and adaptive capacity. Community-based adaptation (CBA) and Ecosystem-based adaptation (EBA) typically involve a 'multi-sectoral' approach that embraces conservation and restoration practices for proven results that utilises local knowledge in harmony with local ecosystems (Jarillo & Barnett, 2021; Nalau et al., 2018; Prasad et al., 2022; Pearson, 2020; Weir, 2020; Zander et al., 2022). A review of the gaps in existing climate adaptation literature by Weir exposed that "community-based adaptation (CBA) has been under-represented in the formal academic literature, as found by [Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change] IPCC in its successive Assessment" (2020, p. 48). The POCCA and Rising Stories reports further challenge deficit framings by documenting community-led adaptation, ecosystem-based practices, customary governance and collective resilience through shared food, labour, shelter and knowledge (Mafile'o et al., 2024; POCCA, 2024). Policy-making should therefore harness Pacific peoples' adaptive capacities as expressed through generations of resilience, Indigenous knowledge and local stories that counter narratives of vulnerability; or non-economic, less materially tangible factors.

Stories identify intangible and non-economic factors

Research has often emphasised economic costs, while people-centred and story-based studies reveal losses and damages that cannot be measured in market terms (Ayeb-Karlsson, 2020; Ayeb-Karlsson, 2021; Burger et al., 2023; Clissold et al., 2023; McNamara et al., 2021a; Serdeczny et al., 2018; Tiatia-Seath et al., 2020). From this perspective, climate research has exaggerated the anthropogenic (human-centred) economic costs thereby diminishing or excluding non-economic loss and damage (NELD) and non-human impacts – for example, on the land, flora, fauna, and in socio-political dimensions (Boege et al., 2022; Burger et al., 2023; Clissold et al., 2023; Jackson et al., 2023; Serdeczny et al., 2018; Vaai, 2019). More specifically, NELD refers to more intangible phenomena including life, human health, human mobility, territory, biodiversity, ecosystem services, Indigenous knowledge, cultural heritage, sense of place, social cohesion, identity and agency, and relational values (Ayeb-Karlsson et al., 2021; Burger et al., 2023; Clissold et al., 2023; McNamara et al., 2021a; Serdeczny et al., 2018). Stories help to identify intangible and non-economic dimensions of Pacific climate mobility.

Studies examining NELD show that what people value most cannot be fully captured by monetary indicators (Ayeb-Karlsson et al., 2021; Serdeczny et al., 2018). Case studies are therefore needed to understand how intangible losses shape mobility, immobility and wellbeing in climate-affected communities. Pacific climate and mental health literature similarly calls for greater cultural awareness, local knowledge and attention to diverse ways of knowing (Tiatia-Seath et al., 2020). Health and wellbeing-related non-economic losses may include traumatic stress, anxiety, and depression linked to sudden and slow-onset climate impacts and perceived mobility or immobility; whether observed or anticipated (Burson & Bedford, 2013; Cundill et al., 2021; Leal Filho, 2020; McNamara et al., 2021b; Sattler et al., 2020; Yates et al., 2022b).

Story-based Pacific studies can make these less visible dimensions more legible to policy through the documenting of emotional, cultural, psychological, economic and environmental experiences of climate pressures, alongside losses connected to identity, ancestral land, spirituality and family wellbeing (Mafile'o et al., 2024; POCCA, 2024).

Stories reveal evolving traditional knowledge and practices

To date, the literature shows that climate change studies and responses are predominantly driven from macro-level global organisations, academies, and governments (Alsford, 2022; Abbott & Wilson, 2014; Havea, 2014; Leal Filho, 2020; McMichael et al., 2019; Newport, 2019). They are rarely informed by micro-level knowledge gathered by local and/or Indigenous inhabitants who have considerable vested interests in the outcomes of policy initiatives and proposed migration strategies (Abbott & Wilson, 2014; Farbotko & McMichael, 2019). In this existing macro-level research context, story-based approaches reveal new knowledge as traditional and local practices are impacted by, and adapt to, climate change and related mobilities/immobilities. For example, Havea's thesis on climate change research in Tonga revealed that "local knowledge is occasionally left unnoticed by those who are disseminating the science of climate change such as the government agencies and climate change policy makers" (2014, p. 77). Havea added, "development of national policies should integrate existing local knowledge of the people together with the scientific knowledge... enhancing adaptive capacity" (2014, p. 79). There is a need to value local and traditional knowledge of dealing with climate change adaptation (Burger et al., 2023; Mafile'o et al., 2024; Nunn et al., 2024; POCCA, 2024).

Storytelling captures lived experience and can bridge epistemological boundaries between different forms of knowledge (Abbott & Wilson, 2014; Ayeb-Karlsson, 2020; Havea, 2014; Janif et al., 2016; McNamara et al., 2021b; Otto, 2017). It is therefore well suited to communicate emergent knowledge and practice in climate mobility contexts. Rising Stories shows that traditional and local knowledge is not static: families across Kiribati, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Tokelau, Tonga and Tuvalu describe adapting customary practices, livelihoods and mobility pathways as conditions change (Mafile'o et al., 2024). The POCCA report similarly frames Pacific Indigenous knowledge as adaptive and innovative (POCCA, 2024). The embracing of local knowledge in policy development and implementation also has the potential to cultivate community inclusivity in the development of meaningful solutions to the issues provoked by climate change in the Pacific region.

Stories foster community ownership of solutions

Community ownership of solutions is strengthened through story methodologies. Local perspectives reveal communities that are often reluctant to move because of likely losses to livelihood, culture and belonging, while also actively pursuing empowerment and resilience. For this reason, scholars emphasise the need to centre Pacific voices in climate migration and relocation policy (Farbotko & McMichael, 2019; Perumal, 2018; Tabe, 2019). Farbotko & McMichael emphasise "communities should have time to voice their needs, debate differing perspectives and make substantive contributions to relocation processes [...] and experience a strong sense of involvement and ownership (2019, p. 151). Perumal states that "seeking out and centering the voices of these communities is a crucial component of creating sensible, effective policy relating to climate change" (2018, p. 59). Tabe also emphasises the "need to acknowledge and honour Pacific Islands' voices and perceptions in discourses on climate change migration and displacement at national, regional and international forums" (2019, p. 1).

While the literature includes action plans and guides for consulting Indigenous communities, there are limited in-depth examinations written by Pacific-Indigenous scholars that give insight into the ethics and complexities of the value systems that govern Indigenous communities' decision-making when adapting in place. Gegeo's (1998) account of Indigenous knowledge as change emerging from within remains instructive because it locates transformation in local perspectives, cultures and languages. Community ownership also requires attention to kinship ties within Pacific communities; nurtured through reciprocity of shared knowledge, lineage, and resources (Albert et al., 2018). Where climate impacts lead to partial or whole-community relocation, effects on social support networks, cultural connectedness, spirituality, and identity, can be extensive (Albert et al., 2018; Yates et al., 2022a). Storytelling approaches can surface and reinforce local priorities, support solutions that build on communal strengths, encourage community-led mobility policy, and recognise circular movement, return, multi-sited belonging, family wellbeing, Indigenous knowledge and long-term local capacity (Mafile'o et al., 2024; POCCA, 2024).

Stories disrupt mobility injustice

Increasingly, climate mobility literature is acknowledging the barriers faced by populations most at risk, including those in the Pacific region (Boege, 2022; De Scally & Doberstein, 2022; Dyer & Neef, 2023; Farbotko & McMichael, 2019; Jackson et al., 2023; Ristroph, 2023; Saddington, 2023; Suliman et al., 2019; Woodworth, 2023; Yumagulova et al., 2023; Zickgraf, 2022). Studies call for recognition of the "ongoing colonisation" (Yumagulova et al., 2023, p. 13) of Indigenous communities and highlight the need to identify common ground and closer dialogue between the Global North and Global South regarding climate mobility research, governmental intervention, and investment (Boege, 2022; Jackson et al., 2023; Nabong & Opdyke, 2023; Vaai, 2019; Woodworth, 2023; Yumagulova et al., 2023).

There is a broad consensus that this could be achieved by advocating for Indigenous-rights centred and Indigenous-led research produced by nations and communities directly threatened by climate related displacement (Alsford, 2022; Ayeb-Karlsson et al., 2021; Boege, 2022; De Scally & Doberstein, 2022; Jackson et al., 2023; Suliman et al., 2019; Yumagulova et al., 2023). This would provide "opportunities for collaboration and mutual learning for Indigenous communities in the Global North and the Global South" (Yumagulova et al., 2023, p. 13). Counteracting this potential collaboration is the issue of rising nationalist populism and populist parties in Global North countries influencing climate narratives (Munoz, 2021; Woodworth, 2023).

The influence of populist political parties has been simultaneously denying and/or obscuring climate change as it impacts the Global South, thereby disputing the status of climate migrants and their mobility status (Munoz, 2021; Woodworth, 2023). Such contemporary narratives and conditions for mobility often feed into pre-existing and typically negative stereotypes of migrants (Munoz, 2021; Woodworth, 2023; Yates et al., 2022a). Persistence of globalised neoliberal ideology and the resultant socio-economic inequalities have exacerbated this trend with several studies illustrating that market-focussed ideologies obstruct significant progress (Dyer & Neef, 2023; Fremstad & Paul, 2022; Jackson et al., 2023; Saddington, 2023; Serdeczny et al., 2018; Yates

et al., 2023). In the case of Pacific peoples, this has involved "instrumentalising Pacific Peoples' own discursive narratives to render them more governable within a market-based adaptive development framework" (Dyer & Neef, 2023, p. 10). Story approaches could potentially disrupt neoliberal/hegemonic discourses and invoke a re-evaluation of policy settings (Jackson et al., 2023; Saddington, 2023).

Mobility injustice is also reproduced through discrimination, exploitation and legal precarity in times of crisis (Ayeb-Karlsson, 2020; Ayeb-Karlsson & Uy, 2022; Everuss, 2023; Naser et al., 2023; Nishitani et al., 2023; Yumagulova et al., 2023). Research on Pacific workers shows that legal status, visa regulations and racialisation can increase vulnerability to exploitation and constrain mobility choices (Nishitani et al., 2023). Migration as adaptation, through labour initiatives or otherwise, "must not be uncritically assumed and assigned to Pacific countries and territories" (McMichael et al., 2019, p. 309) or be presumed to be the best solution (McMichael et al., 2019; McMichael et al., 2023; Miron, 2023; Nabong & Opdyke, 2023; Sakdapolrak et al., 2023). Such framings can position those least responsible for greenhouse gas emissions as adaptive agents expected to move in response to climate impacts.

As outlined in this section, Pacific climate mobility sits within a broader system of mobility injustice, local sovereignty, ocean governance, and political agency, while recognising that mobility/immobility is shaped by concrete pressures, cultural obligations, presiding political ideology, and uneven access to resources and support (Mafile'o et al., 2024; POCCA, 2024). Stories grounded in lived experience can expose and disrupt mobility injustice by making systemic inequalities visible.

Conclusion

This evaluation of research literature clearly shows how story approaches are needed in Pacific climate mobility scholarship. Stories elevate the voices and experiences of Pacific communities who disproportionately experience the challenges of climate change and are navigating adaptation and complex issues of climate mobilities. The themes identified in this literature review underscore that story-based approaches ought to be given due priority in research and policy addressing questions of climate mobility in the Pacific region. Storytelling methodologies are necessary for understanding climate mobility from the perspectives of people living at sites of climate-related change. Pacific oral narratives carry intergenerational knowledge that remains under-represented in climate mobility literature. Further case studies should attend to kinship, community dynamics, place-based obligations, wellbeing, relocation sites and diaspora contexts because these factors shape how climate mobility policies are received and enacted. Story-based methodologies are culturally congruent in the Pacific and can generate the situated knowledge needed for effective, just and Pacific-led policy.

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