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2 "Prophecy from the Past": Climate Change Discourse, Song Culture and Emotions in Kiribati

2.1 Introduction

Pacific Islanders frequently perceive discourses about climate change and what this is going to mean for the Pacific region as imbued with power—especially when statements to that effect involve projections into the future. They clothe their responses to such discourses in various expressive forms. This holds too, in fact especially, for the inhabitants of the State of Kiribati, which is situated in the Central Pacific and often referred to as an atoll state—since the overwhelming majority of its islands are made up of low-lying atolls or reef islands. In the course of contesting the diverse formations of statements about climate change and its consequences for Kiribati, the inhabitants of these islands—the I-Kiribati—have come up with discourses of their own that are accompanied by emotions; some of these discourses find expression in the lyrics of newly composed songs or in contemporary interpretations of the poetry of old songs. In light of these responses, we argue that songs and emotions represent modes of agency vis-à-vis climate change discourses in and about the Pacific atoll state of Kiribati. Songs in Kiribati culture are instruments for exercising power, which is why we now find them implicated in contexts of local debate over climate change. Their agency is especially strong when they evoke emotions able to mobilize audiences. In this context, songs and emotions help to manage a feeling of powerlessness, transforming this into an ability to induce change. In order to illustrate this cultural understanding, we examine a song text of outstanding interest, one long known but now reinterpreted to articulate such emotional discourses on coping with climate change. The efficacy of this song, linked as it is to emotions, stems from the fact that local discourse ascribes to the song a potential for anticipation—making it, from one I-Kiribati perspective, a "prophecy from the past."

Discourses circulating in Kiribati about climate change as an ongoing physical process derive partly from external and partly from internal sources. The external discourses have reached Kiribati, more often than not, via visiting representatives of other states, internationally sponsored projects initiated by Kiribati's government, foreign scientific bodies, international NGOs, internationally networked churches, foreign media as well as experts and private individuals who bring to Kiribati relevant knowledge from their travels. The internal discourses, which have resulted from

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taking over the external ones, are mainly circulated by Kiribati government officials, national politicians and committees, members of local churches[6] and NGOs, Kiribati film production and radio, newspapers published on the main atoll Tarawa, local experts, teachers, travellers, and anybody with a particular interest in the topic. These diverse discourses usually point to the availability of scientific knowledge on climate change on the international level; yet discourses of this kind offer information of variable complexity on global warming and its projected implications for Kiribati. The more nuanced discourses state that diverse scenarios of climate change impacts do exist. Chiefly cited among the projected consequences is a rising sea level, but other outcomes are also canvassed—such as an increase in the annual mean air temperature and a greater incidence of extreme weather events, with grave implications for available drinking water. The government of Kiribati, headed by President Anote Tong, has decided—within the framework of the internationally financed Kiribati Adaptation Program (KAP), phase I of which began in 2003—to launch a cautious initiative, the aim being to communicate an objective perspective on these possible consequences and to champion adaptation as a realistic option. The less detailed discourses are, however, predicated on dramatic developments as real as they are inevitable and unstoppable. They dwell chiefly on the existential threat facing Kiribati—a rising ocean that causes more and more land to be flooded. Since all these climate change discourses are ultimately based on findings by natural sciences considered to be objective and authoritative and legitimized by international and national policies, these discourses have taken on a hegemonic status, demanding consensus.

Since these external discourses of climate change first reached Kiribati via the English language, it happened that the term “climate change” was taken over into the vernacular. In the course of the Kiribati Adaptation Program, this and other related concepts were then translated into that same vernacular—thus “climate change” became *bibitakin kanoan boong*, which is literally rendered as “change of contents of days.” This neologism itself needed further explanation, if the Islanders were to make any sense of it. “Sea level rise” became *rikiraken iabutin tari* (literally: “increase of high tides of the sea/rising of the sea”).[7] When the people of Kiribati, the I-Kiribati, encounter the content of such discourses, they interact with them differentially, processing them and interlacing them with their own commentaries. In the early years of climate change discourses, when these first began to circulate, a number of Islanders contested such discourses, citing environmental, religious, political or cultural counterarguments (cf. Teuatabo, 2002; Kuruppu and Liverman,

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6 On the role of Pacific Christian churches in connection with climate change, see Kempf (2012).

7 See Rudiak-Gould (2012a: 46-7) on the fact that translating climate change vocabulary necessarily involves a shift of meanings and has implications for local perceptions of a threat in the Marshall Islands.

2011). Those who did accept the primary message of anticipated sea level rise, were greatly worried as a result and voiced fears for an uncertain future (cf. Kaiteie and Hogan, 2008: 17; Kempf and Hermann, 2014: 197, 201, 203). Yet many of the latter could not bring themselves to accept the contention, found in less differentiated climate change discourses, that Kiribati's very existence was in doubt. Often the I-Kiribati discern, in the one or other kind of climate change discourse, claims to knowledge that seem to them laden with power, and that in two respects: first, because it is knowledge about powerful and threatening consequences flowing from climate change; and second, because it is knowledge about the future. In view of the claims to truth conveyed by these diverse discourses, but also in view of the changes that I-Kiribati have observed and interpreted in the context of climate change discourses, a sense of powerlessness is now evident among them (cf. MacKenzie, 2004: 4).

Several recent studies examining the reception by local populations of discourses about present-day climate change have drawn attention to the factors of power and knowledge. Thus, Barnett and Campbell (2010: 2) have shown that a chief effect of the dominant discourse about climate change and Pacific island states consists in generally denying agency to local actors. Accordingly, they combine their critique of the hegemonic construction of this discursive formation with a plea for more attention to be paid to what the people of the Pacific region actually think, say and do (their problem awareness, their knowledge and value systems, the solutions they propose). While a number of anthropological studies have drawn attention to diverse forms of knowledge in local populations and how these are related to climate change (see Lazrus, 2012: 290-5), a general consensus exists that more research into the matter is needed. If we too, in this present study, embrace the maxim of focusing on the culturally specific discourses and practices of the Pacific Islanders, it is in order to analyse the potentials these possess for knowledge and power when dealing with discourses on and ramifications of climate change. Addressing the as yet little-noted thematic fields of songs and emotions holds the promise of considerable analytic gains. For purposes of examining songs, our operative assumption is that they are constituted by culture-specific discourses and are interpreted in context-specific fields of power and knowledge. And in our approach to emotions, we pay close attention to how these are articulated, not only in "emotional discources" and "discourses on emotion" (Abu-Lughod and Lutz, 1990) but also in an "embodied" form and even in practices. In any case, we shall be considering the practice of social actors and their specific agency. In adopting such an analytic perspective, we are backing up, we would claim, other anthropological studies dealing with climate change that have called for no less (e.g. Hastrup. 2009: 20, 28; Lazrus 2009, 2012). The concept of agency deployed in this analysis was originally developed by Sherry Ortner (1999: 146-7; 2006: 129-53). Ortner insisted that what actors do and bring about through their acts has to be seen in a field of postcolonial power relations and in a field of cultural meanings. This approach asks us to consider the subjective meanings, as perceived by the actors themselves, i.e. to what extent their acts are intended (or authorized)

and to what extent these acts can be effectively unfolded. From this perspective, we wish to point out that the inhabitants of Kiribati's islands use songs and emotions to articulate cultural knowledge that has significant potential for agency.

In order to illustrate facets of agency, as unfolded by I-Kiribati, we will present one of those songs that come with a long pedigree attached, but are now being recast as commentaries on the projected consequences of climate change and sea level rise.[8] This particular song was composed by Tom Toakai and is known to many I-Kiribati under the name of "Koburake!" "Koburake!" can be translated as "Rise up!" In this imperative, we may see something of a counter movement, opposing the scenario of inundation and disappearance that is frequently invoked by those climate change discourses that are externally derived and rather less differentiated.

2.2 Song Culture in Kiribati

If our interest is chiefly drawn to songs, it is because we construe them as being poetic concretions of local discourses. We are thereby acknowledging that songs and dances, but also dramatic pieces, play a significant role in contemporary Kiribati culture. The contemporary practice of creating songs and dances is approached in two ways, which, despite being clearly different, do exhibit basic reciprocities. Essentially, these two approaches are different ways of responding to whether the I-Kiribati, in creating their songs and dances, can invoke culturally specific power-knowledge or not. Thus we can distinguish two categories of songs: the first are those many songs composed using ritual power-knowledge of a kind only available to selected experts. Composers with such access, who in Kiribati represent different, often competing schools, are usually referred to as *te tia kainikamaen*. The word *tia* means "performer"; *te kai* is "the stick" or "the twig"; and *kamaen* means the domain of ritual composition (cf. Lawson, 1989: 183). What these ritual experts share is that they need to complete a specific training, which will then let them enlist the help of spirits in composing songs, arranging dances, even healing sicknesses (see Bataua, 1985: 126; Hughes, 1957; Kempf, 2003; Kirion, 1985: 48-51; Lawson, 1989: 185, 264ff). All of these things—the training, the handed-down *kainikamaen* knowledge, the necessary ritual practices of the experts—are nonetheless, in present-day Kiribati, exposed to an ongoing process of change, from which highly differential degrees of specialization, practices, convictions, and representations result (see Lawson, 1989). The important point is that the efficacy of these ritually composed songs, i.e. the words used in them, are based on a concept of stipulating and projecting goals—goals to be achieved in the future. The specific and powerful poetics of the songs contributes, according to

8 W. Kempf, 'Climate Change and the Culture of Song in Kiribati'. Paper presented in the session 'Climate Change in Pacific Island Communities', ASAO-Conference, Honolulu, Hawai'i, February 2011.

the composers, to enabling the convictions, viewpoints and goals enunciated in the songs to be implemented and actualized in future. It is this ritually empowered form of anticipation via songs that is of relevance for the account we offer below.

"Koburake!" to which we will turn in this contribution, belongs to the second category of songs—those composed without the aid of ritual power-knowledge. That this is so is mainly because Tom Toakai, the song's composer, cannot reconcile the use of *kainikamaen* knowledge with his duties as pastor of the Kiribati Protestant Church (KPC). Instead, he can, and does, draw on the musical training he has received within the western tradition (especially notation and harmonics)—as is, indeed, customary within the Protestant Church of the land. "Koburake!" advanced over several decades from humble beginnings in a single church choir to become an integral part of the national song repertoire in Kiribati. Its recent linkage with climate change and sea level rise not only underlines its enduring popularity, but also paradoxically stresses what in its agency is primarily associated with ritual power-knowledge, namely the power of anticipation. We are inclined to the view that it is the context of the specific song culture in Kiribati that ultimately renders this articulation possible, thinkable, and plausible. Precisely the cultural knowledge possessed by the I-Kiribati about the power of songs is what lends "Koburake!" the anticipatory potential needed if Kiribati as a Christian nation is to rise up above the rising seas.

Before presenting this song, we wish to point out that songs in Kiribati are frequently, indeed typically, linked to emotions. The lyrics either contain direct emotive concepts—these can be expressed in the form of nouns, adjectives or verbs—or they evoke emotions in the singers and the audience. The latter is the case with "Koburake!" and this will now be the object of close scrutiny. Therefore, the next step is to review those emotions that are especially significant in the context of climate change discourses.

2.3 Emotions in the Face of Climate Change Discourse in Kiribati

Emotions play an important role in Kiribati Islanders' reactions to news about climate change and its projected consequences.[9] Among the emotions articulated in such contexts, those which we gloss as "love," "worry," "fear," "sadness" and "pity" occur fairly frequently, while "anger" and "indignation" are shown rather more rarely. The frequently expressed emotions of love, worry, fear and sadness refer not only to the people but also—often, not always—to the land on which they live. The land, in the cultural logic of the I-Kiribati, is no less properly addressed in emotional terms

9 E. Hermann, "Emotions and Belonging vis-à-vis News of Climate Change." Paper presented in the session "Climate Change in Pacific Island Communities," ASAO-Conference, Honolulu, Hawai'i, February 2011.

than the people are, since these two ideas are linked conceptually and even seen as twin aspects of an indissoluble, ideal unity. This nexus finds memorable expression in the vernacular term *te aba,* which carries the double meaning of “land/people.” Even when one of these meanings preponderates, the other is never entirely absent, operating as it were in the background. One emotion that does stand out in discourses on climate change is the love that is felt for land and people. The vernacular term in question is *te tangira*, which signifies, at once, liking and wanting. Expressing love of one’s land (and people) attests to the existence of close ties with it—no matter whether it is land belonging to a particular family, or the island on which one lives, or the State of Kiribati itself. Statements of worry (*raraoma*) and fear (*maku*) express the fact that both land and people are seen as facing a looming menace. When the I-Kiribati react to worst-case scenarios of inundation by voicing sadness for the land and those on it, they do so because they feel attached to both. The vernacular term for sadness is *nanokawaki*, which refers to *nano* or “heart/feelings/thoughts” giving rise to sorrow and affliction. When speculating about what climate change will do to their islands, the I-Kiribati voice a further emotion that is affiliated with *nano*: *nanoanga*, which, translated literally, means “giving heart/feelings/thoughts” but can also be rendered as “putting oneself in the position of others,” or, more simply, feeling “pity/empathy” (Hermann, 2011). Often it can be heard that this pity is felt in equal measure for people and land. But the I-Kiribati are insistent that they should not be the only ones to feel this emotion; they call on other nations to show empathy too.

All these emotions are far more than mere descriptions of inner states: they are meaningful articulations within the relationships the Islanders maintain with each other and with their land, but also—indeed especially—with those they maintain with people from the outside world. For this reason, expressions of emotions are to be seen as practices that are often articulated with a will to act or, alternatively, with a call on others to act. It is in this capacity that emotions can unfold agency (Hermann, 2004). In the process of interacting with external and internal discourses on the consequences of climate change and sea level rise, emotions have the potential to propel the Islanders to act and also to bolster their social resilience.[10]

2.4 The Song “Koburake!”

The particular song we single out in this paper has exemplary value; it will shed light on the general potential songs have for expressing knowledge and power (cf. Kempf, 2011). This song features prominently in a recent documentary film. This film was produced by a Kiribati-based video company and NGO called *Nei Tabera Ni Kai* (2010). It tells the story of a side event held at the climate change conference in Copenhagen

10 Hermann, “Emotions and Belonging.”

(COP 15) in 2009 and organized by a government delegation from Kiribati. The event’s declared goal was to alert the international community to the specific ways in which this atoll state was at risk from global warming. Part of the documentary shows members of the delegation summarizing where Kiribati’s government stands on this issue; there is also a video clip of then President Anote Tong explaining his own position; and we are treated to scientists presenting various computer scenarios of the possible flooding of South Tarawa, the aim being to paint risks and outcomes that this most densely populated part of the island state will have to confront over the next century.

The last third of the film foregrounds representative segments of Kiribati culture. First, we watch a female dancer perform at the side event in Copenhagen that we referred to; then the film takes a mythical and poetic twist with the announcement of the “Song of the Frigate Bird.” This song is the corner piece of the film’s next section, lasting some five minutes, in which the metaphorical language is rather different from anything preceding it. The clip begins with two sunset scenes, giving way to a shot of a frigate bird in flight and multiple vistas of seemingly endless open sea. A background commentary suggests a link between the song and the likely implications of climate change for Kiribati:

> Ladies and Gentlemen. *Kam na bene ni mauri* and greetings. The frigate is one of our key national icons, the national bird of Kiribati. The song we will hear was written in 1978, many years before we knew anything about global warming, climate change and sea level rise. The story tells of a bird flying the ocean in search of food for its young. On her return she finds that her homeland has disappeared beneath the waves. This prophecy from the past reminds us of the uncertain future we face as a country and as a people. We are pleased to present the youth of Kiribati and the song of the frigate.

Then the song comes in. It is sung by a clear female voice in the Kiribati language. During it we watch a tracking shot of a frigate bird superimposed on an open seascape. These surreal sequences transport viewers into a dreamtime—or is it a vision of the future? Subtitles in English are given below:

I a ukoukora mwengau	I am searching for my home
ma n tiriwetea arana - Kiribati	I call you by name—Kiribati
Ko mena ia?	Where are you?
Ongo banan au anene	hear my call—hear my song
Akea raou ae na buokai	I have no-one to help me
A katukai boong ririki	I have been alone for so long
Koburake! Koburake!	Rise up!
Ngkoe ae tunarin aonaba	You the centre of the world
Routiko rake—routiko rake mai marawa	rise up rise from the depths of the sea
Ba a na nooriko ake amena i keraroa	so you may be seen from afar
Koburake! Koburake!	Rise up! Rise up!

This song evokes a land that has vanished beneath the waves; an entire nation, symbolized by the frigate bird, is searching for its lost homeland. This motif is accompanied by a call to soar upward, to rise up, so that the land can once again be seen from a distance. Then, as the song is repeated, this time in a slightly altered version, the singer, a young Kiribati woman, appears on screen wearing a traditional dancing costume. Next, we watch typical scenes of Kiribati’s land, people and culture, intended to underscore the uniqueness of this nation; also interspersed (in the form of a montage) are images of inundations, drawing attention to the acute dangers now facing this highly specific culture and way of life. The song is now sung by multiple voices. Subtitles are dispensed with this time. In the following, we reproduce and translate the text of the song as performed:

I a ukoukora mwengau	I am searching for my home
ma n tiriwetea arana - Kiribati	I call you by name—Kiribati
Ko mena ia?	Where are you?
Ongo banan au anene	hear my call—hear my song
Akea raou ae na buokai	I have no-one to help me
A katukai boong ririki	I have been alone for so long
Akea raou ae na buokai	I have no-one to help me
A katukai boong ririki	I have been alone for so long
Koburake! Koburake!	Rise up! Rise up!
Ngkoe ae tunarin aonaba	you the centre of the world
Routiko rake—routiko rake mai marawa	rise up rise from the depths of the sea
Ba a na nooriko ake amena i keraroa	so you may be seen from afar
Koburake! Koburake!	Rise up! Rise up!
Koburake! Koburake!	Rise up! Rise up!
Ngkoe ae tunarin aonaba	you the centre of the world
Routiko rake—routiko rake mai marawa	rise up rise from the depths of the sea
Ba a na nooriko ake amena i keraroa	so you may be seen from afar
Mwemwerake! Kiribati	Be lifted up and up! Kiribati
Mwemwerake! Kiribati	Be lifted up and up! Kiribati

Tom Toakai originally composed this song in the late 1970s, at a time when the State of Kiribati was moving towards independence from the British colonial power. In those days, he was venting his scepticism about the new atoll state’s viability. He had composed the original lyrics, which are slightly longer than the segment in the film clip, because he was convinced that Kiribati was over the long run far too weak and small to survive without securing help from the outside. Of significance in this connection is the call “koburake.” As Tom Toakai explained to us, the literal meaning of “koburake” is “bubble up.”[11] The picture he had in mind when composing was that of Kiribati being located at the bottom

11 Our interviews with Tom Toakai took place on 9 September 2010, 3 October 2011 and 4 October 2013.

of the sea—a metaphor for the country's remoteness. What he meant by using the idiomatic expression "koburake" was that Kiribati should rise up to the level of other countries in order to make itself known and so secure the help it needs from the outside world. In this sense, he affirmed, the term "koburake" may aptly be translated as "rise up." It was this idea that the filmmakers had taken over, bringing the song—with the composer's permission—into line with their own objective, which was to draw attention to the urgency of the threat facing Kiribati from climate change and sea level rise.[12] Without concessions and solidarity from the international community, but most of all from the industrial nations, Kiribati's future looks bleak indeed—this is the film's central message, finding memorable expression in this song.

"Koburake!" a.k.a. "The Song of the Frigate Bird" is now known to many I-Kiribati as a result of a DVD released by *Nei Tabera Ni Kai* in 2010. Some in the audience recognized the song as one originally composed shortly before the Islanders had gained independence; others recognized it as the song that had won first prize in a competition between various Pacific states around about the time of the Millennium. Many knew the song already from a book about Kiribati songs (Teaero and Tebano, 2008). To be sure, in the context of internal and external discourses of climate change, such recognition inevitably came with a new interpretation attached. Other I-Kiribati first encountered the song as part of the repertoire of a certain dance ensemble. *Te Waa Mai Kiribati* had choreographed the song for inclusion in a program on climate change that was staged in the United States in 2011.[13]

2.5 Anticipation and Emotions

If, in the discursive context of climate change, the song "Koburake!" is so important to the I-Kiribati, it is because they are convinced that its words, written back in the late seventies of the 20th century, anticipated the future now projected for their homeland. In this scenario, their land is being threatened on a massive scale, requiring them to draw attention to their plight in the hope of securing help from the outside world. The second prong of this scenario is that their survival will depend on Kiribati "be[ing] lifted up." In this articulated statement, they see evidence of anticipatory power. This finds expression in *Nei Tabera ni Kai's* film (2010), especially in the pointed words of the female commentator, who as an I-Kiribati is fully aware of the cultural logic

12 See the film clip posted by Linda Uaan and John Anderson on YouTube: "Kiribati—The Song of the Frigate" http: //www.youtube.com/watch?v=xOcMLWVNIms

13 The tour was part of the project "Water is Rising. Music and Dance Amid Climate Change. Artists from the Pacific Atolls of Kiribati, Tokelau and Tuvalu" Director/Producer Judy Mitoma. See: www.waterisrising.com

of her compatriots and also—this time in the role of filmmaker—displays a talent for summing up their predicament: “This prophecy from the past reminds us of the uncertain future we face as a country and as a people.” These words, let us add, are spoken in the opening sequence of the film section on the frigate bird. But we found that other interlocutors too had, independently of each other, taken to associating the song’s poetics with the future. Also, two composers who had been inducted into the ritual power-knowledge, acknowledged, in respect of Tom Toakai, that even at the time of composition he had been able to foretell the future. Tom Toakai himself modestly conceded to us, when we interviewed him, that he was no prophet. He had, he said, only expressed at that time what was on his mind. But he conceded that from a bird’s eye perspective (ranging widely across space and time) the song can be seen “as a prediction of what was to come after independence”.[14] In this sense, the song’s message is equivalent to a prophecy or *mamata* (“the power of seeing through to the future”).

Emotions evoked by the song confirm the anticipation I-Kiribati discern in its lyrics. When the lyrics say “I am searching for my home,” they feel induced, from the “I” perspective, to look out for the land of Kiribati. When in a following question they are asked about the whereabouts of this land, sadness overtakes them, since they have to assume that what is frequently thematised in climate change discourses has actually now taken place: the land has been swallowed up by the waves. Many show this emotion by facial expression; some even have tears in their eyes, as with one interlocutor, who was prompted by this line to the following comment: “I always hear on the radio: ‘Kiribati will be no more.’” Others prefer to mention it explicitly, which is what a dancer with the *Te Waa Mai Kiribati* group did in conversation with us, insisting that this makes them all sad, or *nanokawaki*.[15] When the words then ring out, “hear my call—hear my song, I have no-one to help me,” I-Kiribati interpret this as a cry for help coming from their innermost core and appealing to people from other lands to show pity, or *nanoanga*. These outsiders are asked to turn to the Kiribati nation with their heart/feelings-thoughts, or *nano,* i.e. to put themselves in their situation, to understand the threat facing the Islanders, and to render all possible assistance. That this appeal is genuine was confided to us by no less than the composer himself: “Yeah, that’s where our hope is”.[16]

The verses “Rise up! Rise up! / You the centre of the world / rise up, rise from the depths of the sea / So you may be seen from afar” are understood by the I-Kiribati as a clear summons to action. But the verses are more than that: they are also words of encouragement, or *te kaunganano,* as various interlocutors assured us. After having been moved to sadness, their next reaction is relief. Thus a young I-Kiribati

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14 Interview, 3 October 2011.
15 Ten T., 30 September 2012.
16 Interview with Tom Toakai, 3 October 2011.

noted: “The last verse is an encouragement to fight against the problem!”.[17] The encouragement the I-Kiribati draw from these verses confirms that the second half of the song is understood to be just as anticipatory as the first. Meaning that if it ever happens that the flooding arrives, then it will also be the case that Kiribati will rise up.

Nor is it the case that sadness and an appeal for pity (and encouragement) are the only emotions these verses evoke. Whenever I-Kiribati hear this song performed, they find other feelings for the land and its people also resonating. If the first questioning verses make them sad, this is also because they love their land, their community, and their nation, as witness numerous locutions in their everyday talk—and in their songs as well. Moreover, their sadness holds yet another dimension: pointing implicitly to the worry and fear engendered in them by discourses concerning the looming threat of climate change. Both the appeal for outsiders to have pity on Kiribati and the encouragement the I-Kiribati derive from a song like “Koburake!” also occur in more recent compositions dramatizing climate change, such as songs by Ten B. Rimon from the year 2010 and by Ten Nenem from 2009 (see Kempf, 2010).

In the I-Kiribati perspective, this song also evokes emotions among outsiders. Thus, it was reported by members of the delegation sent by the government of Kiribati to the climate change conference in Copenhagen (COP 15) that audiences watching a screening of the sequence of “Koburake!” (a.k.a. “Song of the Frigate Bird”) at a side event had been exceptionally moved by the experience. Also, members of the dance group *Te Waa Mai Kiribati* reported a similar reaction in audiences during their tour of America in 2011. A dancer who was in a position to know stated: “the audience really feel the song”.[18] In his account, one woman was even moved to tears. What the I-Kiribati conclude from experiences like these is that external audiences do, in fact, develop empathy and will come to the aid of the land of Kiribati.

If audiences—I-Kiribati and others—are so moved by “Koburake!” this testifies to the song’s power and the emotions it is able to evoke. This assessment was also confirmed by a professional composer we consulted. In his view, everything alluded to in the song had already come true or else would in the near future. Leading members of *Te Waa Mai Kiribati* also saw the song in much the same light: “It says Kiribati is already protected by the ancestors. Kiribati could rise and not be affected by climate change”.[19] These conclusions therefore reflect the logic of the song culture. If this song is able to unfold agency in the context of contemporary discourses of climate change, it is because—following the logic of Kiribati song culture—it is vested with potential for anticipation.

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17 Ten F., 30 September 2012.
18 Ten F., 30 September 2012.
19 Discussion, 30 September 2012.

2.6 Conclusion

"Koburake!" forms part of a repertoire of songs letting the people of Kiribati engage with globally circulating discourses of climate change and sea level rise, doing so on their own terms. As is true of other songs, both old and new, that are now being interpreted in light of the present debate, this song evokes emotions wrought in the same discursive context. The representation of the song "Koburake!" is based on acceptance of scientific projections holding out the prospect of massive imperilment to Kiribati as a nation due to climate change and sea level rise. What this song does is profile itself as an instrument in an official cultural politics, in which the global community is called on to act responsibly and treat Kiribati justly as a country and nation, respecting its sovereignty and securing its safety.

"Koburake!" well exemplifies how the lyrics of songs are able to evoke emotions, articulating, and effectively engaging with emotional discourses on one of the burning issues of our time. Songs and emotions alike, we have argued, shed light on the spectrum of agency unfolded by the inhabitants of Kiribati in reaction to the anticipated risks to land, culture, and society in this atoll state. "Koburake!" along with other songs in that vein, supply ample testimony that composers have seized the initiative in encouraging their compatriots to act. Kiribati audiences too—so much their comments make clear—reflect on their capacities and display a will to act. They do not wish to end up mourning their losses. On the contrary, they combine encouragement with such emotions as love, worry, and pity for land/people, not to say fear at the repeatedly thematicized consequences—and it is these emotions that mobilize Islanders to meet the upcoming challenges. Given the encouragement they themselves derive from the song of "Koburake!" singers, dancers and other I-Kiribati are helping to communicate the message to other nations, hoping the latter will show empathy and solidarity. As the local people see it, performing this song to external audiences has already been effective in terms of drawing a positive response.

Given that the externally derived discourses on climate change are of a hegemonic kind, "Koburake!" and its related emotions are therefore properly seen as counter hegemonic. Discursive formations about this song and its emotions express the fact that the I-Kiribati are not content to submit passively to such hegemonic discourses; they have opted for an active stance instead, mobilizing all available resources to strengthen their social resilience. What is abundantly clear is that there has long existed in Kiribati a knowledge of how important it will be in future to profile their country and to actively built a relationship between it and the outside world. The people of this atoll state can now self-assuredly say that a song by a composer in their midst had already anticipated what the future was holding in store for them and what could be done about it. Faced with external climate change discourses that have thrown their full weight behind projecting future developments, they are now doing what they can to recapture their future by drawing on powers of indigenous anticipation. In this connection, songs and emotions are helping to transform a

feeling of powerlessness into a capacity for exerting influence over themselves and others in order to bring about change.

Acknowledgments: A special thanks to Tom Toakai and Nei Teabo for their illuminating conversations with us. We are greatly indebted to Tom Toakai for making available the lyrics of his song and for going through it with us line by line. Also, we are grateful to Linda Uaan and John Anderson of *Nei Tabera ni Kai,* P. Alofa, C. Anterea, I. Tekai, F. Tebau, and all members of the dance ensemble *Te Waa Mai Kiribati* for many helpful conversations. In addition, our thanks go to N. Kourabi, M. Kokoria and B. Rimon, to Taiman T. and our Banaban-I-Kiribati families and friends as well as to the many other I-Kiribati who extended hospitality to us and assisted us in our research. We are grateful to the government of Kiribati for granting us a research permit; also, to the Cultural Centre, especially N. Itonga, for a successful cooperation. Since 2009 we have spent from one to two months each year in Kiribati. This has also allowed us to continue our research with the Banabans, whose original home island lies in the western part of the State of Kiribati and who now, for the most part, live on Rabi Island in Fiji. In readying this article for publication, we thank Peter Rudiak-Gould and Tony Crook for constructive comments. Finally, a word of thanks to our friend Dr. Bruce Allen, who has once again performed wonders on our English.