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Landscape and Identity in Kiribati

Master’s thesis in Global Environmental History
Abstract

In this thesis, I will look into the relationship between landscape and identity on the island nation of Kiribati, a low lying island nation in the Micronesian region of the Pacific that is currently under threat by climate change. Based on qualitative research from several islands in Kiribati (semi-structured interviews and observations), I explore how landscape and landscape changes, identity, and present and future challenges are perceived by Kiribati residents. Landscape is more than just physical surroundings, encompassing qualities of heritage, memory, skills, knowledge and learning, and there is a strong link between landscape and identity for Kiribati islanders. Respondents stressed the importance of community and the ‘simple life’ as important qualities of life in Kiribati. People still come together frequently in their communities where they discuss issues such as building a new house for someone. Communities have as main purpose helping each other and are based on strong bonds of love and friendship. Respondents defined the simple life as a life without violence, without having to worry about money, without any major natural disasters (apart from climate change), and a life in which people are open and friendly to everyone. When it comes to present and future challenges, most respondents were worried about issues related to environmental changes such as changes in fresh water resources and coastal erosion. Although many respondents felt the effect of these environmental changes and people have become more aware of the link between those and global warming, many residents remained sceptical towards climate change, simply because believing it would make it real. A future challenge respondents were worried about is the risk of having to resettle in the future. They are afraid that this will affect their community, their Kiribati identity, and that it would mean the loss of the simple life. For example, the idea exists that in other countries people will not smile on you on the street and that the only family you will have is your core family. Many people also never had to find a job and this is something that scares them as well. I conclude that landscape is a part of every aspect of life in Kiribati. Therefore it is strongly connected to the sense of identity of Kiribati islanders and many fear what will happen in the case of a radical landscape change.

Keywords: Landscape, Identity, Kiribati, Migration, Climate Change

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“Te Mauri, Te Raoi ao Te Tabooma”
“Health, Peace and Prosperity”
Offical Motto of Kiribati
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1. Introduction

Kiribati is a nation of islands that has been subject to radical landscape changes in the recent years as it is, and that will be heavily affected by climate change in the future (Ives 2016; Weiss 2015). In this thesis I will explore how the people of Kiribati perceive their landscape, how they use it to construct their identities, and how they define present and future challenges. I have spent two months on various islands in the Gilbert Group during which I have talked to numerous Kiribati residents, formally and informally; these conversations will form the base of my thesis.

I first directed my interest to Kiribati as I had the idea of doing my thesis on climate refugees. I knew I wanted to do something related to climate change and climate refugees so I started looking at which regions are already experiencing the effects of climate change. I then stumbled on the islands in the Pacific. Because most of them are low-lying atoll islands, rising sea levels threaten their existence. Doing research without an initial contact seemed impossible to me, therefore I started reaching out to different organizations that work on the topic of climate change in the region. At one point Peleisne from Kiribati Climate Action Network (KiriCAN) responded that she could help me so I decided to go to Kiribati. As scientists predict that Kiribati will partly or completely disappear in the next decades, questions surrounding climate migration and environmental refugees are highly applicable to the islands (see Worland 2015). The debate around climate refugees has been highlighted especially since the previous government under Anote Tong made ‘migration with dignity’ one of its main focuses (see below). However when I actually arrived on Tarawa, the main Kiribati island, and started talking with people living here, I realized that Kiribati is more than just climate change and migration. The lives of the people of Kiribati are not focused on climate change, on the contrary it is not a big worry for a lot of people, as I will discuss in Chapter 4. Therefore I decided to widen my research scope to fully understand what it means to be from Kiribati and what their islands mean to them. Migration is still a part of this thesis, as many residents fear that they will have to move to another place. It is just no longer the main question or sole focus of the thesis. I believe that to fully understand what moving to another country means to Kiribati islanders, it is important to understand first what their landscape means to them today and how they draw identity from it.

1.1 Introducing the problem

Kiribati consists of a group of 32 atoll islands and one higher island, Banaba, situated in the Micronesia region (Macdonald and Foster 2016; Republic of Kiribati 2017). The nation is divided into three main groups of islands; the Gilbert Islands that are the most populated ones, the Phoenix Islands that are largely uninhabited and the Line
Islands that are on the dateline border. Around 112,000 people inhabit the Kiribati islands and more than half of them live on the main island Tarawa. The main source of income today in Kiribati is copra, a type of dried coconut flesh, and fish. As the country is one of the poorest in the world almost half of its budget comes from international aid. The political system consists of an elected president who appoints its government and an elected parliament where delegates from the different islands come together.

As mentioned before, Kiribati is subject to a number of changes. Some scholars argue that the islands will completely disappear within the next 50 to 70 years (Worland 2015; Weiss 2015). With the continued and projected sea-level rise the probability that the islands will disappear is highly likely, as the highest point in Kiribati is only three meters. However some scientists such as Arthur Webb and Paul Kench do not agree with this doomsday proclamation. They both argue that the islands have to be viewed as active entities that can grow and that are more resilient than we think. Research shows that atoll islands can respond to changes and that a lot of them are actually growing instead of sinking (Warne 2015). Of the 600 islands they have researched, 80 per cent stayed at the same level or grew. Often when one side of an island is being washed away, the other side will grow. Important to note here is that this is the case for islands that do not have a lot of permanent structures on them. Densely populated islands such as Tarawa, do not have the same capacity to react to changes since they have many permanent structures that lock them in place. On Kiribati, a system of ancestral land exists to divide the land between the population. Families own land that has been passed on through generations before them. This makes moving houses to the other side of the island very difficult. Yet, even if the islands do not completely disappear people might still be forced to migrate due to water shortages and overpopulation issues, both issues that are brought up by islanders and that will be discussed in Chapters 4 and 6 (Weiss 2015; Edwards 2013). In addition, as Kiribati has few resources (see above) combatting negative effects of climate change and related problems is very difficult and islanders are mostly dependent on other countries to help them out.

As already discussed above, in recent years when Kiribati was discussed in the media it was mainly in the context of climate change and migration. Some of these headlines include ‘Life on the next Atlantis: Doomed Pacific island which will be swallowed by the sea within 60 years’, ‘Kiribati's climate change Catch-22’, and ‘Drowning Kiribati’ (Edwards 2015; BBC 2015; Goldberg 2013). The former president Anote Tong became a voiced activist in climate change debates, and he became also known as a climate activist leader (Worland 2015; Ives 2016). He gave a TED talk on the topic and spoke to numerous media outlets and international organisations about it, trying to spread awareness about the climate change threat that Kiribati faces. Under the government of Anote Tong, Kiribati has also purchased land in Fiji to have a place to move to if the islands disappear. Anote Tong also tried to set up programs for ‘migration with dignity’. These programs are based on long-term merit acquiring so that people can move to countries such as Australia and New Zealand (Maclellan 2012). Because people learn skills, they can contribute something to their new society. It also aims at making sure migrants are treated as citizens and not just refugees. The focus of the previous government on migration was not always well received by both receiving countries and the Kiribati population. Many people in Kiribati want to stay because they do not want to leave their land behind (see Chapter 6). The current government (previously in the opposition) is trying to find other
solutions for climate change that do not require the population to migrate. One of the things they are looking into is raising the level of the islands or creating floating islands.

As most of these news stories about Kiribati and its people are negative, I wanted to give a voice to the people of Kiribati themselves to get their story about being from Kiribati. It is impossible to represent the full story of their landscapes, their identities, and their Kiribati, so I will focus on the voices of a few selected individuals. The aim of this thesis is to give an idea on what a Kiribati identity means to the Kiribati people, how they view the landscape around them, and what they identify as the biggest challenges for their islands.

![Fig. 1: Map of Kiribati (US Dept of Congress 1989).](image)

1.2 Research questions

In this thesis I will address three main research questions that each have a corresponding analytical chapter:

1. Do Kiribati residents see a change in the landscape? (Chapter 4)
1. If so how do they define it and what do they see as causes of it?

2. How do Kiribati residents define and construct I-Kiribati-identities? (Chapter 5)

3. What do Kiribati people define as present and future challenges for their island? (Chapter 6)

My analysis is based on around 20 interviews I did on the islands of Tarawa, Marakei, Abaiang and Abemama carried out from 1/09/2016-27/10/2016. I tried to select my respondents at random by talking to people on the street and I also talked to some people that were pointed out by facilitators on site. When a translator was not available I had to focus on people who speak English, which of course also creates a bias in the people I talked to. All in all I think I interviewed a wide variety of people with each their own stories to tell about how they view their island. I will discuss my methodology more in Chapter 3.

Each person I talked to had their own ideas and explanations about what it means to be from Kiribati and about the changes happening around them. The aim of this thesis is to present these ideas and explanations based on the conversations I had with Kiribati residents.

This thesis draws inspiration from studies of scholars such as Escobar, Gupta and Ferguson, Tilley, and Woodward, as they all have done research in some way related to the relationship between space and identity. Their literature will be discussed in Chapter 3. Most of the literature about Kiribati is related to climate change or related problems such as water resources (see above). Putting in a google scholar search for Kiribati usually gives you related searches such as ‘Kiribati climate change’ (around 15 400 results), ‘Kiribati sea level rise’ (around 13 700 results), and ‘Kiribati environmental refugees’ (around 5 510 results). As mentioned above, this thesis aims to widen that scope and look at how landscape and landscape change have an effect on Kiribati identity.

1.3 Presentation of the thesis

This thesis consists of seven chapters. The first chapter, the introduction, aims at introducing the problem of landscape and identity in Kiribati. In it I discuss how Kiribati is commonly viewed in the media and in the literature. I also talk about some of the problems Kiribati faces and what led me to decide on my thesis topic. In the introduction the research questions and the objectives of the thesis are also included.

The background chapter (Chapter 2) has the purpose to give a short background of the history of the Pacific in general and of Kiribati more specific. It also includes a short introduction to the everyday life in Kiribati (which will be elaborated on in Chapters 4 and 5) and a short analysis of what religion is like today on the islands. To understand what Kiribati is today, it is important to know its history and where it comes from. This chapter aims at creating a basic understanding of Kiribati society by including its history, one of its creation stories, and stories of everyday life.

In the third chapter I will explain the concepts of landscape and identity that have shaped this thesis and how they are discussed in the existing literature. I lay out my argument in this chapter. Landscape is seen as cultural landscape that is more than just physical surroundings. Where you come from will have an effect on how you
view the landscape. Therefore it is not a stable entity. Identity is defined from a non-
essentialist viewpoint. Same as landscape, it is also constantly changing. From there
on, I argue that landscape and identity are closely related. Because they are both never
fixed, this link is not problematic. I will also explain the methods I used while
conducting and analysing my research. In this part I also touch upon the ethics of
doing research.

Chapters four, five and six, are analytical chapters in which I will discuss what the
people of Kiribati view as their landscape and how it changes (Chapter 4). People
mostly identify landscape as physical surroundings but when they discuss it, it
becomes clear that is more than that. Landscape changes can be divided in two
groups: changes related to sea inundation, and changes related to population. In
Chapter 5 I discuss how Kiribati people define their identity. This is different for
every respondent but a few main elements came forward. These are community,
landscape, and Kiribati values. In the last analytical chapter (Chapter 6) the
respondents talk about what they see as present challenges (coastal erosion, water
resources, and unemployment) and future challenges (climate change and migration).

Lastly, in Chapter 7 I sum up what I have described in the analytical chapters and I
give answers to the research questions formulated in Chapter 1. Chapter 7 also
includes recommendations for further research.

A short introduction to the people I have interviewed and where I met them, can be
found at the reference list. They are organized on the basis of the island where I have
interviewed them. I also included some of my interview questions in the appendix.
2. Background

2.1 The Kiribati Creation Legend
According to the old stories and legends Nareau (‘spider’) the Creator created the islands and the people living on them (Beiaubre et al. 1979: 1-6). He managed to separate ‘Te Bomatemaki’ which means the Earth and the Sky sealed together. While doing this he had help from other figures such as Nareau the Wise, Na Atibu, Nei Teakea and several spirits like Uka, Nabawa and Nei Kika. As the first island he created was Samoa, this creation story then shows us already the role of the Samoan migration in Kiribati culture. Some other, more northern islands have different creation stories that have more similarities with the Marshall Islands’ stories. As Samoa is Polynesian and the Marshall Islands Micronesian, Kiribati has older relations with these Marshall Islands’ stories. But the Samoan migration in the 14th century had a big impact on Kiribati culture (see below), especially on the southern Gilbert Islands (Peterson 2009: 216; Fischer 2013: 62-63). As Hiram Bingham only introduced the written word in the 19th century, finding these creation stories is difficult. Therefore this small part includes only one of many variations that exist of it.

2.2 History of Kiribati
As Kiribati mainly consists of atolls, constructing a coherent narrative of the archaeology and the history of Kiribati is rather difficult (Fischer 2013: 28-30). As Gupta and Ferguson (1992) argue, cultures are formed in a connected space. In Kiribati, as on other island countries, there is no radical separation between islands as they are always in some way connected to each other. At the same time, as I will discuss here there are also cultural differences between islands. Due to the connectedness between islands and island countries in the Pacific, it is important to understand the broader history of the Pacific and the different trade empires that existed, to understand the formation of Kiribati. Oceania is a place of ‘trans-localism’ where interactions took place between places that were dependent on the ocean (Matsuda 2012: 5). To understand the history of one place, it is important to understand the histories of the places that were linked to it. A lot of the values that exist in Kiribati today have their origins in the history of the country and in old practices. For example, elders still have a high position in communities today, in the past a community of elders was in charge of the village.
2.1.1 History of the Pacific: Prehistoric- European arrival

I will begin by shortly discussing migration patterns that shaped the islands in the Pacific and the different trading networks and cultures that came into existence. The first people to migrate into the Pacific came around 50,000 years ago from South East Asia (Matsuda 2012: 14; Fischer 2013: 4; Macdonald 2001: 1). They first arrived in Australia, New Guinea and some islands in Melanesia. At that point it is most likely that they were seafarers already to whom canoes had great importance. In New Guinea for example, the Kula Ring was established (Matsuda, 2001: 16). Between islands in New Guinea a trade system came into existence in which bracelets and necklaces were exchanged. From historical observations it is known that much of this trade was not for economic purposes in the conventional sense of the word. It happened for symbolical and ceremonial reasons as a way to reinforce political alliances and marriages.

Around 8000 to 4500 years ago another wave of migrants reached the Pacific, the Austronesians (Fischer 2013: 11-13; MacDonald 2001: 1; Ridgell 1995: 24). Austronesians travelled into the Bismarck Archipelago and further into Melanesia. Here the Austronesians formed the cultural complex of Lapita, which is characterised by a certain kind of pottery (Fischer, 2013, pp. 13-17; Matsuda, 2001, pp. 16-17). It is believed they settled as far as Samoa, opening up the Pacific to be populated. Important to note here however is that the Lapita pottery never reached Micronesia and thus Kiribati, which suggest that Austronesians did not go that far. The Austronesians were able to populate the Pacific because they invented new types of canoes that were able to carry heavy loads. The Lapita people domesticated animals, cleared land for agriculture and mostly lived on the coastline. Same as the earlier Kula Ring (see above), they set up a trade system between different islands, not only for economic reasons but also for political or ceremonial purposes.

At around the same time as the Lapita, a different group of Austronesians travelled to the islands of Yap, Palau and the Marianas in what is now called Micronesia (Fischer 2013: 28-29; Matsuda 2001: 23-24; Ridgell 1995: 24). Here the Austronesians also established complex trading systems, for example the Yap trading and tribute network around 600 BP. Yap is a group of islands that received political and ritual power from the fact that they were the only high islands surrounded by a ring of atoll islands. Because of their geography Yap was less vulnerable to famines or drought, although the people at the time attributed their prosperity to the power of the gods, which assured them dominance over the region. People on the coral islands would offer them goods in exchange for rewards. If an island would not give these offerings, the Yap threatened to use their power to cast disasters on them. During this time, people on the Caroline Islands developed a seasonal circuit to migrate between the islands to search for food (Matsuda 2001: 24). This led to the establishment of trading rings between them in which they would help each other if one of the islands was struck by disaster. Around the tenth century a new dynasty from the Pohnpei Island took over the Yap empire (Matsuda 2001: 24-25). The Saudeleur dynasty had the city of Nan Madol as its base. Nan Madol was said to be created by the two gods Ohlosipa and Ohlosopa and consisted of more than 90 artificial islets. The Saudeleur eventually took control over Pohnpei, keeping Nan Madol as their spiritual, ceremonial and administrative centre. You can still visit its ruins today. There is no evidence that Kiribati directly traded with Yap and the Saudeleur Dynasty but to its proximity to the Marshall Islands and the Caroline Islands we can assume that it might have felt some
indirect effects of it (Beiabure et al 1979: 6). Evidence of this can be found in stories on the northern Gilbertese Islands. These stories talk about links and connections with Micronesian islands such as the Marshall Islands.

Thus, Polynesian culture developed out of the Lapita complex on the Fiji-Tonga-Samoa-Crescent around 3200 years ago (Fischer 2013: 31-32). People in this area traded and interacted with each other, while at the same time gradually losing contact with Western Lapita and therefore establishing their own culture. From this crescent they also travelled to the more distant islands Tokelau, Niue, Rotuma and others. Eventually they voyaged as far as Rapa Nui (Easter Island) and Hawai‘i (Fischer 2013: 36). Not only did they explore the seas and conduct voyages in search of resources but sea voyages also had become a vital part of their culture. Important to note here is that the Polynesians colonized Tuvalu around 3000 years ago (Fischer 2013: 32-33). Tuvalu is located between Fiji and Kiribati, therefore an important ‘gate’ from Polynesia to Micronesia and the other way around. As this short history introduction shows us, migration and trading has always been a big part of Pacific Islands’ cultures. Islanders did not exist by themselves, and interaction between islands and travels (and also migrations) between them were part of their culture. Therefore when discussing the culture and history of one island, it is important to keep in mind that these are heavily linked to and influenced by the cultures and histories of other islands. As Matsuda (2013: 29) put it, “the Pacific is shaped by overlapping histories”.

2.1.2 History of Kiribati
Kiribati is a part of the Eastern Micronesian Islands and as mentioned before part of the Fiji-Tuvalu-Kiribati chain (Fischer 2013: 28). It is believed that the first people who lived on Kiribati came from the west, being related to the Austronesians that reached Melanesia (Macdonald 2001: 1; see above). When talking about Kiribati people in its ‘early’ days, it is important to note that this mainly refers to the Gilbert Islands as the Phoenix Islands are still mostly uninhabited and the Line Islands were found uninhabited by the first Europeans (Thomas 2003: 4). The Austronesians probably reached Kiribati via the Caroline and Marshall Islands. Around 4000 to 5000 years ago, a new wave of Austronesians reached Kiribati, overtaking the first people that lived there. One theory posits that these new people came from southern Melanesia. However there is reason to believe that people from Kiribati previous to this actually migrated to Melanesia. Linguists have reconstructed languages and found linguistic similarities between the two regions. In addition, the direction of the currents and the winds makes it more likely that people migrated from Micronesia to Melanesia. Still today some Kiribati myths and stories, for example the creation story, relate how there were migrations to Samoa and after some time migrations back to Kiribati (MacDonald 2001: 3). Cultural links with Samoa are still strong, for example the use of a maneaba (eg. communal meeting house), and researchers believe that there was a recent migration from Samoa to Kiribati around 500 years ago (Kirion and Karaiti 1979: 10).
Links and connections can also be found between Kiribati and more northern Micronesia (Macdonald 2001: 3). This again shows us that Kiribati culture cannot be properly understood without knowing the history of the other islands in the Pacific. The migration of Samoans around the fourteenth century marks an important event in Kiribati history, though in some legends as related above this is explained as a return of Kiribati islanders (MacDonald 2001: 3; Petersen 2009: 213). The Samoans introduced maneabas and certain socio-political forms to Kiribati (Petersen 2009: 216; Fischer 2013: 62-63). Stories point to Beru as the first contact island and from there new traditions spread in Kiribati.

Over time two separate entities, the northern and southern complex, had developed on the Gilbert Islands in Kiribati (Petersen 2009: 216; Fischer 2013: 62-63). The southern islands were influenced by the Samoan traditions and ruling lineages whereas the northern islands were independent. Eventually, probably around the 17th century, the northern Islands where colonised by the southern islands, leading to two centuries of resistance and conflict between the old traditional chiefs and high-ranking landowners, and the new southern elites. Before the invasion the southern and the northern islands had different socio-political systems. Councils of old men ruled the southern islands, and elders still play an important role today as I will discuss in Chapter 5. On the northern islands however, powerful chiefs and landowners controlled land and people. A shared system of power like on the southern islands did not exist.

There was some early contact between Europeans and I-Kiribati but since Kiribati does not posses a lot of resources, most contact was brief (Onorio 1979: 29; Fischer 2013: 86; Macdonald 2001: 16). For example, Darwin visited some of the Phoenix Islands during his five-year travel (1831-1836) (Phoenix Islands 2017). He visited the islands to explore the creation of low-lying atolls. Around 1788 the Gilbert Islands...
were formally named (Fischer 2013: 96-97; Macdonald 2001: 15). Two captains of the British East India Company called Gilbert and Marshall, accidentally happened on what are now called the Gilbert Islands and the Marshall Islands. When they ‘discovered’ the two big island groups they decided to not so modestly name them after themselves.

The first real long-term contact with Europeans began with the interaction with the whalers and traders (Fischer 2013: 97; Onorio 1979: 33; Macdonald 2001: 16). From around the 1830’s whalers began to visit Kiribati regularly since there are a lot of sperm whales in the area (Onorio 1979: 29-32; Macdonald 2001: 17-18; Macdonald 2001: 23). This first contact was not always peaceful, as Kiribati islanders viewed these strangers as enemies. Kiribati islanders claimed that the natural resources of the island belonged to them and that they were not available for exploitation by the Europeans. Despite this, some trade was established in which Europeans would trade iron hoops and tobacco for food and women. In some cases Kiribati islanders would even work on the whaling ships and Europeans would move to one of the islands, becoming beach combers who often acted as teachers or mediators and who were fully integrated into Kiribati society (Onorio 1979: 29-32; Macdonald 2001: 20-21). At the same time as the whalers became active, permanent traders started to settle themselves on the islands (Onorio 1979: 33-34). They mostly traded for the same things as the whalers with the only difference that traders brought regular commerce to the islands. Another source of interest from the side of the Europeans lie in the trade of labour. Around the 1860s labour trade was introduced in Kiribati (Onorio 1979: 34-37). At first people were often kidnapped as slaves to work on plantations, for example in Fiji, but later voluntary recruiting became the norm. Many of the people that sold their labour expected to return to the islands as wealthy. But not all of the workers returned, a lot of them died while others decided to migrate to different islands (Onorio, 1979: 34-37).

In the 19th century missionaries started to travel to Kiribati as well (Etekiera 1979: 38-39; Macdonald 2001: 31). The early missionaries were met with resistance as beliefs in traditional gods and customs were very strong. The most famous missionary in Kiribati was Hiram Bingham, a protestant missionary who went to the island of Abaiang. Hiram Bingham is often viewed as the pioneer of Christianity in Kiribati and as the person who developed the written form of the Kiribati language (Etekiera 1979: 38-39; Macdonald 2001: 33). You can still visit his grave today in Abaiang. Other Protestants working for the London Missionary Society (LMS) went to the southern Gilbert Islands from Samoa. Many residents converted to Protestantism though the LMS. Reportedly, when the first missionaries from the Roman Catholic Church arrived, they did not receive a friendly reception as many residents had already converted to Protestantism. Catholic priests tried to lure people to come to their services by giving them gifts such as tobacco and cloth (Etekiera 1979: 41; Fischer 2013: 168). Catholic priests also sent more missionaries to the central and northern Gilbert Islands, as the Protestant Church was less present there. Eventually the Catholic priests also gained many followers. In their services, missionaries urged Kiribati islanders to give up some parts of their culture. For example, the church advocated against the practice of magic and the practice of having more than one wife. Later when the church was stronger they also made laws about this and people who did not comply were punished by for example being banned from the church. Today most people belong to Roman Catholic Church or the Gilbert Islands.
Protestant Church but there are also smaller churches such as the Seventh Day Adventists (Etekiera 1979: 43).

Illustration 2: The grave of Hiram Bingham on Abaiang.

In the 19th century the British Empire involved themself increasingly (following the missionaries) on Kiribati and ultimately they claimed Kiribati as a protectorate (Takaio 1979: 65-66; Macdonald 2001: 76-77). Unlike the missionaries and traders who never actually tried to control Kiribati societies, the British sought to rule and dominate Kiribati. They established a government and introduced a law and order system. After a while the British also invested in schools and hospitals. In 1916 the Ellice Islands or what is now called Tuvalu, were also included in the Protectorate (BBC: 2011). Most Kiribati islanders did not resist the British leadership, their traditional leaders had given their consent to accept the status as protectorate and at that point they were also used to foreigners being present on the island (Takaio 1979: 65-66; Macdonald 2001: 76-77). Some residents even argued that the British could stop internal warfare that had been present on the island. The British allowed Kiribati islanders to appoint their own island officials, giving them a sense of autonomy and inclusion. According to Takaio (1979: 70) there was a generally positive attitude amongst Kiribati residents to the British Protectorate (Takaio 1979: 70). But Kiribati islanders also disputed land claims made by the British. They felt that the land the traders occupied was given to them in unfair agreements or agreements that Kiribati islanders did not understand. They therefore tried to claim land back. Another problem was the mining industry on Banaba Island (Schutz and Tenten 1979: 74-75). Banaba had a large supply of phosphate and industrious mining destroyed a lot of the land owned by Banabans. At first Banaban islanders could protest openly against selling their land but later they were pressured by the British Phosphate Commission (BPC). The British government also made appropriation of land by BPC compulsory. In addition, the discovery of the large phosphate supplies on Banaba led to the neglect of the other islands (Macdonald 2001: 75). British headquarters were moved to
Banaba and from then on their policy was focused on extracting as much phosphate as possible rather than developing commerce in other sectors.

In 1941 the Japanese army occupied Tarawa (Fischer 2013: 208). Only in 1943 they were liberated by the Americans after the bloody Battle of Tarawa in Betio in which more than 6000 people died in less than 72 hours (Fischer 2013: 210; Dean 2016). All of the casualties were American, Korean or Japanese and until today cannons and other military equipment are still present in Betio. After the war the Gilbert Islands and the Ellice Islands never actively claimed independence from the British Government (Fischer 2013:259-260). Neither Gilbert Islands and the Ellice Islands had the resources to be states of their own. Only Banaba had generated income enough, but around that time the phosphate reserves were almost completely gone (BBC 2011). But when the British initiated the process of independence, the Ellice Islands asked for their independence from Kiribati as they view themselves as Polynesians. What used to be Ellice Islands became independent in 1978 under the name of Tuvalu. Kiribati eventually became independent in 1979 (BBC 2011).

Illustration 3: Remnants of World War II on Betio Islet, Tarawa.

2.3. Everyday life in Kiribati

In this chapter I will try to give a first idea of what life in Kiribati is like. Most of this will be discussed more broadly in Chapters 4, 5, and 6 in which I discuss how my respondents view the landscape around them, their identity, and present and future challenges. Life in Kiribati is often viewed as a ‘simple life’ but it also has its complexities. In the first part I will give a short introduction to the subsistence lifestyle on the outer islands and the different lifestyle on Tarawa. Then I will discuss religion on Kiribati as it has become increasingly important on the islands.
2.3.1 Everyday life

Everyday life in Kiribati is different on the outer islands than it is on Tarawa. Much of this difference has to do with a different landscape, as I will discuss in Chapter 4. This part aims to give a first, basic idea to understand what life in Kiribati is like.

Most people on the outer islands survive on subsistence. Therefore most of their days are focused on looking for food. Iutita gave me an example of what a normal day looks like to her during our conversation:

“I wake up, do the clean up around the house and boil the water for the breakfast with the coconut. We have breadfruit in our home so we collect the breadfruit, then some shellfish.”

Iutita lives on Abaiang, which is one of the outer islands in the Gilbert Group. Most people living there have a similar lifestyle to her. They collect things such as breadfruit, pandanus and coconut during the day and also go fishing or looking for shellfish. When I was talking to people who live like this they mentioned two ways they were able to earn some money. The first one is the most popular one, selling copra. Especially recently when the current government doubled the price of copra, selling copra is a good source of income. I will discuss this more in detail in Chapter 4. Copra is made by first cutting up the coconut and then letting its flesh dry in the sun for a couple of days. It can be used to make for example coconut oil. The second way people can earn some money is by selling fish that they have caught. When taking a plane or a boat people often send dry fish with someone to be sold on Tarawa.

Of course not everyone on the outer islands survives on subsistence. There are also for example teachers or government officials who earn a monthly salary. However, they often still help collect food for their families, as Teraoi, a police constable on Marakei, describes:

“I live at the far-east village of Marakei and everytime we wake up, the first thing we do is collect coconut for copra. That is our first job of the day. And later we do the fishing for the family.”

Even though he has a job as a police constable he still helps collecting food for his family. He also mentions here that they still sell copra as well. This quote shows us that many people on the outer islands still collect their own food, regardless if they have a job or not. As Teraoi mentioned, collecting food and fishing is important to sustain the whole family.

On Tarawa less people are able to live this way due to space issues, as I will discuss in Chapter 4. More people have to have jobs there because otherwise they will not be able to provide for themselves due to the high population density of the island. However, there are not a lot of jobs available, which leads to a big problem of unemployment and of youth unemployment especially. Again, I will discuss this more in Chapter 4. The government is trying to give people incentives to move back to their original island by raising the price of the copra but not everyone possesses traditional skills anymore, causing them not to be able to go back to their home island.

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1 Tebunginako, Abaiang, 04/10/2016
2 Rawannawi, Marakei, 16/09/2016
2.3.2 Religion

When I talked to people in Kiribati, all of them were members of some kind of church. As I have discussed above, missionaries came to Kiribati in the 19th century and although there was some initial resistance, in the course of the 20th century many islanders converted to a Christian faith in most of the islands (Etekiera 1979: 38-39; Macdonald 2001: 31). Before the introduction of new religions, every island had their own ancestral gods and spirits (Macdonald 2001: 7). They each had their own shrine to which sacrifices (first food, later tobacco) could be made. Some of these shrines still exist and are respected today. On Marakei for example, the old goddesses are still very important and sacrifices are mandatory upon arriving on the island. It was common belief that when two islands that had different gods fought against each other, the island that won had the strongest gods (Ridgell 1995: 32). The defeated island would then sometimes replace their old gods with the new stronger ones. This belief could help explain why so many Kiribati islanders took Christianity as their new religion as many of them viewed Europeans as stronger and more powerful.

Today amongst many Kiribati islanders, two views exist on the combination of ancestral gods and spirits, and Christianity. In the first view, the traditional gods are not mutually exclusive to the Christian god; a hierarchy exists between them. Kaaibo explained this difference when I was talking to her:

“...For the church we pray and they will repent you and invite you to the heavens and for the old gods only honour.”

This quote shows us that Christianity is viewed as the most important religion. It is the one you pray to and it is also the one that will get you into heaven in the end. The old gods are still important as a heritage to honour both the tradition itself and also the ancestors. However, the old gods can also have special powers. One woman I talked to on Abaiang said that if you for example wanted a love potion or to murder someone you have to go to the old gods. Connected to the old gods are witches that would use the magic of the old gods for example to heal people. Iacinta from Abemama told me the story of the one time she asked her grandmother, a witch, for help when her husband divorced her. Her ex-husband had moved back to Tarawa:

“My grandmother taught me what to do. Ok tomorrow, you go and catch the sunset, I catch the sunset and I don’t know why. She just told me to catch the sunset. She said to me: “after two days you will receive a call from him.” She just predicted the thing and it came true. I went the second day and then I was told that my husband wants me to talk with him. It was nine o’clock so I had to find a transport to get there because there is no communication telephone, it’s just like the radio to have contact with people on the outer islands from Tarawa. And my grandmother told me “I tell you if he calls you, you don’t have to go.” And if I go then something will happen to me and if you don’t go something will happen to me, the spell will go back to me. So I didn’t go, made myself strong.”

Iacinta asked her grandmother for a spell to make her husband come back to her. It worked and everything her grandmother predicted that would happen came true. In the end she chose not to answer the call and by doing so stopping the spell from

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3 Tebunginako, Abaiang, 04/10/2016
4 Binoinano, Abemama, 13/10/2016
happening. This example shows us in which way the old gods and the spirits might still be important today in peoples everyday lives.

The second view of the old gods amongst other Kiribati islanders holds that that the old gods are still very important but bad. The old gods are viewed as satanic and they should not be worshipped in any way anymore. Even though Iacinta once asked for a spell, she deeply regrets it as it conflicts with her Christian faith:

“I feel sad because maybe I betrayed the faith, the way of living in a mission life. And to me I feel sad and downhearted because of what I have done. I think it’s something bad and I have to confess.”

Going to the ancestral gods and spirits for help is viewed a sin. As Iacinta mentioned, she felt like she had to confess it to the parish and ask for forgiveness to be able to still be a member of her church. One woman I talked to, mentioned that even if witches were able to heal people, they were still evil as it was Satan trying to divert people away from God.

Thus today an embedded duality and negotiation still exist between traditional, ancestral practices, and belonging to the church and being a good Christian. For some this duality is not a cause of conflict whereas for others it is.

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5 Binoinano, Abemama, 13/10/2016
3. Theory and methods

In the first part of this chapter I will discuss the different ideas about landscape that have been influential in shaping my study. This part is mostly focused on the concept of ‘cultural landscape’ as that is how I define landscape in my analysis. Then I will talk about definitions and ideas on identity. This discussion is centred around the debate between an essentialist and a non-essentialist view on identity. Afterwards I will discuss the relationship between landscape and identity, using the definitions of landscape and identity from the previous parts. The final part of this chapter is focused on the methodology I used while doing the interviews and while analysing the data. This part also includes a discussion of the ethic decisions I made while doing my research.

3.1 Landscape

When looking at definitions of landscape, landscape is usually viewed as “the landforms of a region in the aggregate, a portion of territory that can be viewed at one time from one place” (Merriam-Webster 2017). In dictionaries landscape is defined as something purely physical, the features of a certain land. In the academic literature, there are two main ways to look at landscape, a natural landscape and a cultural landscape. When looking at landscape with a naturalistic perspective, landscape is separated from human activity and it functions as a neutral background on which humans act (Ingold 1993: 152). As Merriam-Webster put it, landscape is merely something that can be seen, the physical landforms of a certain region. A cultural landscape on the other hand, entails that the landscape is part of human activities, it contains memories and histories and it can be viewed as “an expression of cultural identity” (Strang 2008: 51-52). In this definition, landscape is more than what you see, it has certain meanings attached to it that are defined differently by different individuals (Strang 2008: 51-52; Escobar 2001: 143). Every individual constructs their own identity and society, and is constructed by them. How you view yourself and your society will define how you view the landscape. This is related to the anthropological concept of perceptual relativism (Ingold 2000: 15). Perceptual relativism means that people with different backgrounds and histories experience reality in a different way because they have different frameworks to process it through.

In this thesis I will use the idea of a cultural landscape instead of that of a natural landscape. As I will discuss in Chapter 4,5 and 6, landscape is more than just ‘nature’ or the ‘environment’. Although respondents usually referred to changes in their physical surroundings when discussing landscape change, it is clear that ideas about identity and culture are intimately tied to the landscape. For example, the concept of ‘ancestral land’ is still used by families to divide Kiribati land and define ownership. Ancestral land means that the land you own is passed on to you by your ancestors.
Therefore land has a cultural value and is also connected with individual identity. For example, often your ancestors are buried on the land you inherit from them. This example, and others that will be discussed in detail in the coming chapters, show us the importance of looking at landscape in a holistic way so that it encompasses culture and identities. When looking at landscape with a naturalistic view, things like ancestral land and the importance of it, might be ignored in the analysis, creating big gaps in the understanding of a certain society (Escobar 2001: 141).

A first implication of looking at landscape as a cultural landscape is that the opposition between human and nature disappears (Ingold 1993: 154). In Western countries nature is often viewed as something separate from human society (Radkau 2008: 1; Heinrichs and Gross 2010: 1-2). Nature and humanity are viewed and treated as two different spheres that have a relationship to each other but that are also completely opposed to each other. A human-nature duality is presented where ‘human’ denotes everything that is artificially produced and in which ‘nature’ is everything that is not. Human and nature are not just represented as different from each other but humans are also perceived as dominant over nature (Byrne et al 2013: 1). This is less present in Pacific Island cultures like Kiribati culture (Dickie 2005: 1). People are generally strongly connected with their land. It feeds them, supports them and supplies them with necessary items for the household. For example, in Kiribati a lot of people still live off the land. Kaaibo explained this dependence on the physical surroundings when she talked about her everyday life:

“I wake up in the morning, no breakfast, go straight to the bush to collect the pandanus to make the roof and come back to boil water, look for the coconut and boil the rice. Eat it. And then go to the sea to catch some fish. Then boil rice, cook with the fish, eat it for lunch. And the same in the afternoon, we go to the papaya pits and cultivate it.”

We can learn from this quote that I-Kiribati get their daily food and their materials to build their houses from their immediate surroundings, creating a deep connection with nature. I will give more examples of this connection to nature in Chapters 4, 5 and 6. Because people in the Pacific and in Kiribati in specific are deeply connected to their environment, the distinction between nature and humanity is not present (Dickie 2005: 1-2). This is also another reason why a broader interpretation of landscape is used here so that it also includes culture, traditions, ancestors, and identities. Physical surroundings are still viewed as something sacred and having a close relationship with it is important. Active interaction with your surroundings is not only a tradition but also an important part of daily life (Escobar 2001: 146). The difference between the European and Pacific worldview teaches us that landscape is more than just physical surroundings and that nature and humanity are linked to each other (Strang 2008: 52). Importantly, landscape is not something humans just act upon, people interact with it (Strang 2008: 52; Escobar 2001: 143). Every time someone goes into a certain landscape they bring their own identity into it. Through this interaction identity is reproduced and knowledge is transmitted, thus humans are part of the landscape and are not distinct from it. For example, one of the people I talked to, Pelenise, expressed that it is important for I-Kiribati to maintain this practical knowledge as it makes you a “resilient I-Kiribati” who “knows when it’s going to be rainy or sunny, when to cut copra or dry the copra, when to do the laundry and when not to do the laundry, when

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6 Tebunginako, Abaiang, 04/10/2016
7 Temwaiku, South Tarawa, 23/10/2016
to go fishing and which time of the year you are going to catch this type of fish.”

This example shows us that being I-Kiribati is closely tied to a certain landscape and that knowledge is transmitted through the landscape, I will discuss this more in Chapter 5. Related to topic of knowledge, Ingold (2000: 21) argues that every landscape consists of different cultural forms in the same way every language consists of different sounds, inspired by the ideas of de Saussure who made a difference between the signifier and the signified. Because these cultural forms are encoded in the landscape, knowledge can be transmitted by someone showing the forms to you. The information alone about the cultural forms is not enough. Knowledge exists when you can situate the information and understand its meaning in relationship to the landscape it is in. Again, this is similar to the way language is constructed. Just knowing separate sounds is not enough, to understand a language is to understand the sounds in their context.

Ingold (1993: 162) calls this interconnection between practical knowledge and landscape ‘taskscape’, or the space of human activity. It is constantly being formed. Ingold (2000: 20) argues that there cannot be an organism without a landscape in the same way that there cannot be a landscape without an organism. Because you give meaning to the landscape, it exists and develops itself around and with you. The landscape is made by human activity but it also creates human activity (Ingold 1993: 162). For example, in Kiribati, leaves from the pandanus tree have proven to be good material to weave mats with it, having thus an impact on human activity. Because these leaves are an important material for building houses, Kiribati islanders plant and maintain pandanus trees, thus shaping the landscape. Through this interaction, both people and landscapes are in a constant process of building themselves. Therefore landscape is never stable, it is always in the process of being produced (Tilley 2006: 7; Ingold 1993). Important to note here is that of course not only people interact with the landscape, animate objects, animals, and inanimate objects (for example trees) are in a constant interaction with the landscape (Ingold 1993: 164). In this thesis, I will mainly focus on the interaction between human activity and landscape, rendering both animate and inanimate objects as parts of the landscape that people interact with. For example, one respondent, Francis, described how there are “few fish” in the sea now when discussing landscape changes. Francis viewed fish as part of the landscape and a decline in fish therefore means a change in the landscape, showing us that other animate objects are part of the landscape.

The definition of what landscape is and does to the individual also has implications on how identity-landscapes are connected. Escobar argues that the ‘lived body’ or identity is “the result of habitual and cultural processes” (Escobar 2001: 143). As discussed in this part, individuals and the way individuals construct their identity and are constructed by it, construct the landscape. Therefore identity is linked to landscape, it is both the product and the producer of it. I will discuss this connection more in Chapter 3.3 and in Chapter 5 in which I will discuss how Kiribati people define the connection between their identity and their landscape. This link is also present in Chapter 6 when respondents discuss what they think will happen to their identity when they would move to a different country.

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8 Temwaiku, South Tarawa, 23/10/2016
9 Binoinano, Abemama, 13/10/2016
3.2 Identity

When asking someone about his or her identity it is often defined by what it is not (Gilroy 1997: 301-302; Woodward 1997: 2). The difference between you and someone else is what distinguishes you as a person. This is something that came up during my time in Kiribati as well. When talking with some people in Kiribati they often used other countries, ‘overseas’ as a tool to talk about their own culture. I will give examples of this in Chapter 5. This shows us that identity is often defined through opposites (Woodward 1997: 2). By defining what identity is not, it becomes clear to a person what that person’s identity entails. Using difference as a way to construct your own identity fits into the debate between essentialist and non-essentialist views on identity and can be used in different ways.

In general we can divide views on identity in essentialist ones and non-essentialist ones (Tilley 2006: 9). The first idea is the oldest one and argues that identities are stable and grounded. The social and historical context might change but in their core, their essence, the identity stays the same. This position argues that there are some key features of identity that never change, no matter the space or time. These key features can either be biological or traditional/historical (Woodward 1997: 28). Identity is fixed and has not and will not change across time (Woodward 1997: 11). From an essentialist viewpoint identity consists of “past experiences and expressions of previous generations” (Tilley 2006: 9). Defining identity in such essentialist and static terms has several implications on the definition of particular social groups. The first implication is that because a core of key traits exists, not a lot of variation in identity is possible within groups (Tilley 2006: 10; Woodward 1997: 9). The second, and related, implication is that because each group has their own essence, there are strict boundaries between different groups. Belonging to more than one group becomes impossible, because, in an essentialist view, definition of identity is based on similarities in the own group and differences with another one. A non-essentialist view posits something completely different. It argues that individuals do not have a stable identity (Tilley 2006: 8–9). Identities are in constant process of formulation and reformulation as individuals respond to changes and redefine themselves. This view implies that within groups there can be variation in identities, and boundaries between groups are not that strict but fluent. Every identity is merely a reflection of who you are at a certain time in a certain space. Woodward (1997: 18–20) argues that even national identities can be different from each other because of the different ways they are imagined and constituted. So even if the idea exists that there is a national or community identity, it is always being re-imagined. Through your identity you are still connected to your past but not completely as in the essentialist view. Someone with a non-essentialist position can look at differences and similarities in and between certain groups to define an identity (Woodward 1997: 11). As identity changes over time, it can also be valuable to look at how the definition of a certain identity has changed and thereby opposing the same identity with itself. Even the way the past is remembered is constantly transforming and changing.

Bourdieu adds to this discussion that people live their lives in different fields or social contexts (Woodward 1997: 21-23; Inglis and Thorpe 2012: 216). Each of these fields has its own social expectations and norms. Therefore identity is experienced differently in each field and people thus have multiple identities. Bourdieu’s social theory can be viewed to align with a non-essentialist view on identity, as identities are considered diverse and always changing. One person does not posit one rigid identity,
on the contrary he/she has multiple ones that adapt to the social expectations and norms of each field.

During the interviews and conversations with Kiribati residents, identity was part of the discussion. Firstly there is the shared concept of ‘being Kiribati’ I-Kiribati, but the content of that concept varied between individuals. However, respondents talked about traits that were for them typically ‘Kiribati’, for example, community, landscape and certain values. I will discuss these more broadly in Chapter 5. Defining the key traits of an I-Kiribati identity can at first sight give the expression of an essentialist viewpoint, however it does not need to be. For example, when looking at community, it is clear that how they way community is defined has changed over time. Traditionally, communities on Kiribati consist of the people of a certain village. Now, however, with the rise of the church communities are often made up of people who go to the same church. The church does not have to be in the same village, as long as it brings together people of the same faith. Even though it might feel that a certain identity has some core traits, the combination of those traits only exist in a certain moment and is always in a process of change. Another important note to make here is that the traits I identified were all based on answers the people I interviewed gave to me, they identified being I-Kiribati in this way. The elements of community, landscape, and certain values, are all elements that were brought forward by the respondents.

A lot of fear of migration comes from looking at identity from an essentialist viewpoint. If your identity is stable and fixed, moving to a different country, a different group will leave no possibility to maintain your ‘old’ identity because there are strict distinctions between different groups (Tilley 2006: 10; Woodward 1997: 9). You cannot belong to two at the same time. A lot of respondents expressed this fear of losing their community and their identity. This will not necessarily be the case. When using a non-essentialist viewpoint, people can adapt to their new surroundings and find ways to integrate part of their ‘old’ identity into their ‘new’ one. Migrating to a different country does not mean you lose all connection to where you come from. I will discuss the relation between landscape change and identity more in the next part (3.3 Landscape and Identity).

A side note we can make here is that sociologists also make a difference between identity and roles (Castells 2009: 6-7). The main difference between the two is that roles are norms constructed by outside institutions and identity is constructed by the individual to create meaning. Of course identity is influenced by outside constructions as well but it is something the individual has internalized. When I talked with people in Kiribati they often had formal roles as representatives of the community. I talked to elders who are basically the leaders of the communities and one of the people I talked to, Tebau, was not only an elder but also a former mayor of Marakei. Therefore besides talking to them as individuals, I was also talking to them as representatives of their communities.

3.3 Landscape and Identity

When you imagine identity, it is often tied to a certain place (Tilley 2016: 14; Ingold 1993: 162). Landscapes entail certain ideas or feelings about identity and as discussed earlier the taskscape is also part of it. Because human activities are part of the landscape, identities can be formed and passed on through the landscape. For
example, certain practices also tell a history and reinforce a practice as customary and as identity construction. Above I have discussed the role of certain practices of resource use and knowledge (e.g. everyday practices) but there are also ritual and ceremonial practices. An example of this is the anti-clockwise tour of the island you have to perform on Marakei when you first get there. According to the legend, a King sent two warriors to tour the island to look for any obstacles, the one who made the clockwise tour died and therefore visitors should always make an anti-clockwise tour of the island. During this tour it is important that you bring some sacrifices to the goddess as well. Marakei is the only island where this is still the custom and is therefore often viewed as the most superstitious island. This example shows us that through an activity in a landscape, certain ideas about identity and the history of a place are passed on. How particular groups engage with the landscape depends on their beliefs and practices (Strang 2008: 52). For example, people living on different islands in Kiribati do not have the same rituals even though they have almost the same physical surroundings. Marakei’s strong superstitious beliefs impose a certain meaning on the landscape. Every landscape has its own memories and cultural traditions that ultimately shape it (cf. Strang 2008: 52).

Some authors argue that the link between identity and place is becoming more and more problematic because more people are wholly or partially deterritorialized (Gupta and Ferguson 1992: 9; Malkki 1992). There is a rapid increase in people moving away from their ‘homelands’, often taking their own cultural practices and products with them, introducing elements of a different culture in an already existing culture. As migration is a concern for many Kiribati residents, this discussion is relevant for them. As I will discuss more in Chapter 6, they often fear that they will lose their identity and culture if they move. I argue that this is only the case when using an essentialist idea on identity and culture. As discussed in the previous part, from an essentialist viewpoint, identity is stable and definable through a group of key traits making variation within groups impossible and creating strong boundaries between them. A changing landscape can destroy these strict boundaries and thereby leaving people without identities (Gupta & Ferguson 1992). However, if you look at identity in a non-essentialist view, identity can change and there are no clear boundaries to social groups. As both landscape and identity can change, increased mobility does not threaten the relationship between landscape and identity, it simply means that it will take on a different form. Bender (2001) argues that ‘home’ landscapes are always changing as well, using a non-essentialist viewpoint. A stable landscape does not exist as it might change because of people leaving or because of external forces affecting it. The ‘home’ landscape is an illusion created by memories and stories. To give a practical example, I refer again to the transformation of village communities into church communities (see above). As people from the outer islands migrate to Tarawa, these church communities act as their ‘second family’, their ‘home away from home’. This example shows us that even though an aspect of Kiribati identity has changed, from village communities to church communities, it does not mean landscape and identity have become separated from each other. It simply means that both ‘landscape’ and ‘identity’ to the individual has changed with circumstances. Another example of how both landscape and identity change without it being problematic was given to me by Francis, when we were talking about changes in Kiribati culture. Francis is a music teacher so naturally he brought up that in the past, they only had access to their own music. However in recent years with for example the introduction of radio, new music made its way into Kiribati culture:
“The changes we have are we mix our culture with other cultures and we do it with like our dancing. We can use music, there’s no music here long ago. But now we use it for our dancing and our traditional dancing.”

This shows us that an element from a different culture, music, has been introduced and that Kiribati culture has adapted itself to it. During traditional dancing, Kiribati islanders will now often use a mix of old village songs and new foreign songs to dance to. Again this taps into the idea that both landscape and identity respond to change and that they are never fixed or stable.

We can conclude that landscape and identity are linked to each other. Landscape and identity are in a constant process of constructing and reconstructing each other and are therefore never stable.

3.4 Methodology

3.4.1 Interview Process

I used qualitative interviews in combination with participant-observations.

I conducted 25 interviews in total but as the quality of the interviews got better with the later interviews I will not use all of them. I tried to let the respondents define their own concepts and let them talk about their own experiences by doing semi-structured interviews. This means that I had a list of topics and questions I wanted to address but that there was also room for the respondents to give some of their own ideas without me guiding them too much. Some examples of the questions can be found in the Appendix. As I only had the opportunity to talk to each respondent once, I could collect the information I needed and I let the interview open for possible new insights. I also found that using this format, put the respondents at ease. Often the interviews were very similar to conversations in which my respondents felt comfortable.

I developed these questions through informal conversations and while interviewing, as I gradually built up a better knowledge about the people and the landscape. Through allowing respondents to take over the interview, the resulting conversation also brought out some very interesting things. For example, after I had a conversation with a woman about what community means to her, I decided to start asking questions about this. All of this led to me testing my interviews constantly and to me refining them. As I had never done interviews before it was a learning process to discover what works and what does not work. As mentioned before, I will not use the first interviews I did because of their poorer quality even though I have learned a lot from them. They helped me refine my later interviews and gave me valuable insights to life in Kiribati. Doing semi-structured interviews also helped me in this process as respondents would give information about things I did not think of before.

I have tried to select my respondents at random to get a diverse group of people. However this was not always possible because of a language barrier. Not everyone spoke English and I had little to none knowledge of Gilbertese, the local language. I overcame this partly by using a translator when I could but this was not always possible. I used two different translators, both of them were my friends who I met in the places I was staying at. They also helped me find people to interview. Because of

10 Binoinano, Abemama, 12/10/2016
this there is a bias in the people I interviewed as most of them were well educated. Even when I used a translator this might have had an effect on the interview as well, as sometimes some of their own ideas might have slipped in. Nonetheless I still feel like I assembled a good group of respondents and that the information I got from them is still valuable. It still taught me a lot about how people in Kiribati live and how they experience the world around them.

Before I started the interviews, I would always explain who I was, what I was doing and what would happen to the information they shared with me. If people did not want to be interviewed, I did not press the matter and respected their wishes. After I conducted the interviews, I asked them to write down their names and where they were from so I would know how to spell it. All the interviews I did happened with consent and people were always happy to tell their stories.

As I mentioned before I also did some small scale ‘participatory’ observations, I tried to emerge myself as much as an outsider could for such a short period in time in the Kiribati lifestyle. This means that for example I went fishing on several occasions, I participated in cultural events such as traditional dancing and celebrations, I tried to learn where to find the good coconut for cutting copra, etc. This gave me a better impression of how Kiribati people actually live than by just doing interviews. For this reason I tried to always stay at small local-owned hotels or even just stay with families. Most places I stayed at I stayed for ten days to two weeks, allowing me to get to know the people I was staying with and their lifestyles. Because I stayed for this amount of time in places, it was possible to form friendships and build relationships on mutual trust. I believe that because of this, I got a good insight in how people live on Kiribati. For example, because I knew people I got invited to participate in cultural events such as the celebration for a girl’s first menstruation to which I otherwise would not have had access to. However, even though I tried to engage as much with Kiribati residents as I could, I always remained an outsider. Doing research and analysing the data, happened from an outsider perspective.

While I was doing the interviews I would always tape-record them and transcribe them later. I tried to transcribe as much interviews as I could while I was doing my research so it would be easier for me to see if I actually got all the information I wanted out of them. This really helped in the process of refining them. I also kept a research diary in which I would write down any observations I made during the day or any interesting things that came up during informal conversations. This again helped me as well in refining my interviews and in processing the data later.

3.4.2 Data Analysis

To be able to analyse the data I collected I transcribed all the interviews I had carried out. I chose to not add these interviews in the appendix for several reasons. The first one is an ethical reason. After I transcribed the interviews I did not have a chance to read them back to my respondents. I feel comfortable with using parts of the interviews in this thesis to illustrate what I have learnt, but for including the whole interviews I feel I need the approval of my respondents. As Kiribati is so remote, I have no way of accessing my respondents again without actually being physically there. The second reason has to do with language. I slightly edited the quotes I use here in the text, to make sure that the answers of the people I interviewed are easily understandable to the reader. However to edit the whole interviews (as the English
translations is not always of high enough quality), I would have needed to read back final versions to the respondent to ensure that they were transcribed correctly. This has not been possible as I have been unable to go back to the Islands since I transcribed the interviews. Even though I have slightly edited what the respondents said, I always made sure that the meaning of the text and the context of it has not changed. As I will not include the interviews in the appendix, I will include many quotes in the actual text so that the reader has a good view of where my interpretation comes from.

I have decided to keep the first name of the people I have talked to. This because I made them aware of what our conversations were used for and they gave their oral consent for it.

The most important thing to me when writing the analytical chapters (Chapter 4, 5 and 6) was to make sure that the people I interviewed are presented correctly. Often the interviews were more conversations in which persons decided to tell me about their lives. I have tried to capture the individual character of each of these conversations to give a more personal understanding of the person who has shared his/her stories with me and also to give the reader a better understanding of the context of each interview.
4. Landscape change

In this chapter I will discuss how the people I have interviewed describe landscape changes and what they think causes these changes. When it comes to landscape, people usually understand it as the environment around them. This means that they refer to things like changes in the coastline, or houses where there used to be none.

4.1 A changing land

I spent a great deal of time conversing with people how the landscape has changed and possible causes behind change. They usually defined landscape in terms of physical changes. I have structured the discussion on the basis of the different islands as they each have their own characteristics. For example, Abemama is located almost on the equator while the other islands are above the equator. Marakei is the only island that has the shape of a full circle with two narrow channels connecting the lagoon with the ocean. This means that the lagoon side is not as much exposed to big waves as the lagoons of the other islands. It also means that there is almost no fish population inside the lagoon. On Abaiang a village, Tebunginako, had to move already because of a sea inundation. I will discuss this later in this chapter. More importantly, and as I explained in the background chapter Tarawa is the most populated island in Kiribati. I will start with the outer islands Abaiang, Marakei and Abemama, and then I will discuss the main island Tarawa. As in the coming chapters I will base much of the discussion on the actual interviews and quotes from the interviews to let my respondents tell their own stories and their own ideas. Most respondents comment on sea inundation and its effects, but when listing landscape changes many also bring up changes in demography. I will begin with exemplifying how sea inundation is discussed, focusing on the different islands.

4.1.1 Sea inundation and temperature changes

Sea inundation occurs when the ocean enters previously dry land because of repeating storm surges and/or strong tides. When I was doing my research I encountered two places in Kiribati where this has lead to the forced movement of part of the population. The first place is the village of Tebunginako on Abaiang. Here a sea inundation destroyed a plantation and it forced the people living there to move more inward. Even after the move, some houses get flooded every year because of a king tide. Important to note here is that the flooded area was land reclaimed from the ocean by closing off small channels. The second village is the village of Eita on Tarawa. However I was not able to do research here because of time and budget limitations.
On the other islands, Marakei and Abemama, respondents also discussed some changes in the coastline, although not as dramatically as on Abaiang.

Illustration 4: Sea inundation in Tebunginako, Abaiang during high tide.

**Abaiang**

Respondents on the outer islands, such as Tebuntintaake and Aata, usually point out changes in the sea level and in the abundance of trees, as landscape changes. Many respondents related how the sea level has risen (or rather the tide) and how it has affected their food and water production. In some cases it also affected where they live. This is especially true for the people I interviewed from the Tebunginako Village on Abaiang Island. As mentioned before, the Tebunginako villagers already had to move their settlement to the other side of the island because of a sea inundation. I also interviewed some people from Tebero Village who had similar experiences. The inundation from the sea had other effects on the landscape such as salinization of freshwater and increase of mosquitos. I will lift out two examples here both from Tebunginako Village of how this is discussed by informants.

We begin with Tebuntintaake who is an older woman from Tebunginako Village. She lives on subsistence and selling copra. Tebuntintaake was interviewed in the village Maneaba in Tebunginako where at the time local women were playing bingo and preparing food. I came into contact with her through my friend and translator Kabua who thought the Maneaba village was a good place to meet people. We had a long conversation focusing on how she experiences daily life in Kiribati and what she thinks is important about being from Kiribati. We also discussed the sea inundation, as Tebunginako Village is an extreme case of it. She describes some changes she saw:
“Before this place (pointing to where the ocean entered the land) was land. I used to live there but now I moved to here. There’s a well there to collect water. Before it was fresh but now it has become salt. Those are the changes I saw.”

In this quote Tebuntintaake mentions the sea inundation and the consequences it had on her own life. She mentions having to move and the salinization of the fresh water. Especially this last part is important as fresh water is becoming more and more scarce which I will discuss under present and future challenges in Chapter 6.

Another interview I did in Tebunginako Village was with the elder Aata. I met him also through Kabua and we had a conversation in his kia kia (a local hut). To welcome us in his home he offered us some coconuts and afterwards we went for a walk around the village. Aata lives on subsistence farming; he collects shellfish, coconut, breadfruit and taro and occasionally he goes fishing as well. He planted the trees needed himself and he also takes care of a papaya pit. Aata recounted in detail his experiences with water inundation and in particular with the growing problems of mosquitoes.

“Because I was born here and I grow up here, before people stayed around the coastal area, and before, this was land (pointing to where the ocean entered the land), people prefer to live near the coastal areas because of the mosquitoes. Because here in the main land, there are lot of mosquitoes because there are a lot of ponds. You know the ponds produce a lot of mosquitoes so a lot of people, most of the household, stay there in the coastal area.”

Aata also gave more details on the process of inundation and how it affected the crops that people grew. According to Aata the flooding started about 17 years ago, when “strong wind and wave” caused inundation on land that was formerly dry. Aata now refers to the land as “broken” saying how:

“[…] the waves, you know when the sea inundation occurs, it kills all the papaya, and the bananas and people move to the inland because of sea erosion. And you can see now it’s only the church here, and the church is almost gone.”

The reference Aata makes to the land as broken, alludes to an image of the coastline acting as a wall against the tide, protecting the land that lies behind it. Aata also gives already some explanations for the sea inundation by pointing to strong winds and waves. Changes in wind patterns is also something people on the other islands noticed (see below). Similar to Tebuntintaake, Aata refers to consequences of the inundation when talking about it. For him, the effects of inundation mean less land for food production and an increase in mosquitoes.

Another change Aata mentioned during the interview is that not only on land producing enough food is getting harder but that he also has more trouble catching enough fish to support himself:

“The same with the sea, before I went out fishing, I used to get a full bag of rice [for the fish] but now no only small size. So there’s a decline in fish too.”

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11 Tebunginako, Abaiang, 04/10/2016
12 Tebunginako, Abaiang, 02/10/2016
13 Tebunginako, Abaiang, 02/10/2016
14 Tebunginako, Abaiang, 02/10/2016
One of the main foods in Kiribati is rice that is usually sold in bags of 25kg. This quote shows us that often surviving on your own food is not enough anymore and that some part of it needs to be sold in order to buy other products such as rice and flour. It also shows us that changes in the landscape are not only defined as changes on the land, but also changes in the ocean surrounding the land. As Aata and many others in Kiribati depend on the ocean for their livelihood, this should not surprise us.

As I mentioned earlier I also went to Tebero Village on Abaiang. There I visited a catholic community together with the translator Kabua. After lunch, when it is usually too hot to do some work around the house, I met with an elderly couple, Tiria and Atanea. While I was doing the interview with Tiria and Atanea, two of their grandchildren were present as well and Tiria was making a bag out of an empty rice bag for her granddaughter. In the background a radio was playing; that radio is their main source of information of what is going on in the rest of Kiribati. Tiria and Atanea also had problems with inundation, they had built a sea wall made out of wood and other organic materials next to their kia kia to stop their house from flooding during a spring tide. I mostly talked with Tiria during the interview but towards the end Atanea became more engaged in the discussion. Tiria and Atanea both live on the food they collect themselves and Tiria discusses some changes she has noticed when collecting shellfish:

“… In the past when they go fishing it was easy to get fish but now it’s very difficult. Like we turn around the stones, there’s the reef and we can find fish there. But now we turn around the stone but there’s no fish.”

For Tiria the decline in the fish population is related to another change in the landscape, coastal erosion that causes people to live more closely together than before. Most of these people collect shellfish for their food, which leads to a decline in the amount of shellfish available. Over the years land has been decreasing, resulting in that people live more densely on the island. Tiria explains the changes in terms of populations increase, like this:

“And because of the growing population because before there were only there one house, you know, no houses near them. And now their house is there and another one and another one so the growing population is one of the problems creating the problem. […] Near the coastal area, a lot of places that used to be there, before we used to build homes, before we have homes near the beach but now no more. And the place we were building our houses has been eroded”

At the base of the problem of the decline in the shellfish population and the increase in the population density, is the erosion of the coastline. Less place to build houses means living closer together. Living closer together means more people are making use of the same resources, shellfish in this case. Tiria has noticed a fourth change in the landscape around her. She mentions that the vegetation is changing, describing how vegetation is affected:

“You know before they were green leaves but they have become brown because of hot, they are feeling too hot.”

15 Tebero, Abaiang, 26/09/2016
16 Tebero, Abaiang, 26/09/2016
17 Tebero, Abaiang, 26/09/2016
Where plants and trees used to be green and healthy, now they are brown and too dry. Tiria attributes this to a change in temperature. She mentions that it is hotter than before and that this has negative effects on the vegetation.

These examples show us already some other problems that are related to the change in the landscape; people are having more and more problem collecting enough food for themselves and water resources are becoming scarce as well, as Tebunintaake mentioned. I will discuss these related problems later when talking about the challenges Kiribati faces in the present and will face in the future in Chapter 6.

Marakei

As mentioned earlier, Marakei is different from the other islands because it is the only island that forms a full circle. This has some implications for the lagoon side of the island. Only two narrow channels connect the lagoon with the ocean. During low tide the channels are so shallow that it is not possible to steer a boat on them. During high tide however, the Baretoa pass between Tekeran and Baretoa becomes a playground for children. During high tide the channel is deep and has a strong current making it a favourite spot for children to play in the water. A bridge connects the two villages with each other and this bridge is perfectly located for the children to jump off into the channel. Marakei is also viewed as the island with most “superstitious” people, both by people from other islands but also by Marakei islanders themselves. For example, every visitor to Marakei has to take an anti-clockwise tour of the island upon arrival to give some sacrifices to the goddesses of the island. If this is not done, people are hesitant to take you in because they will consider you as you are cursed. Another example of this spirituality is related to the traditional dancing, before the dance the dancers drink a kind of potion that allows the spirits to come out during the dance. The dancers often go in trance, a psychological and physical condition that is highly regarded and aspired in Marakei communities.
People see the same changes in the landscape as in Abaiang although not as pronounced as in Tebunginako. The Marakei people I have interviewed mostly see changes in the coastline and in the vegetation. I will illustrate this using quotes from four different people I have met and talked to.

I first met Tebau when I was looking to rent a bike to make my way around the island. As there are no bike shops on the island I had to rent it from a private person. The guesthouse I was staying at brought me into contact with Tebau who was the grandfather of one the people managing it. I met up with Tebau later in the week and we sat down and drank some toddy together. During that conversation Tebau mentioned that he used to be the mayor of Marakei and a retired teacher that still teaches sometimes. Tebau is an important elder who has lived in Marakei all his life. I met up with him for lunch after he had guided some other visitors around the island for their customary anti-clockwise trip. We mostly conversed about the rich experiences of Tebau, but also about Marakei and Kiribati culture more generally. At one point he described some changes in the landscape:

“Maybe the ocean because the ocean is the most vicious to our lives in Kiribati with the coast. [...] The waves, the current, the winds, the whole thing changes compared to before.”18

Here Tebau identifies the ocean as the biggest threat to Kiribati because it is eroding the coastline of Marakei. Changes in the landscape are viewed more broadly than just physical changes on the land connected with the ocean. Tebau also mentions that the winds and the currents are changing, similar to what people like Aata experienced on Abaiang. When I was in Marakei I also got in touch with the local police department.

18 Rawannawi, Marakei, 17/09/2016
I met them through Urea, a police constable who also owns a small business. Urea suggested I could meet up with some of the other constables in the police office. The police office was built during colonial times and is very small boasting two small cells for offenders. Both Urea and Teraoi, another police constable I interviewed, reassured me that the two cells were not used a lot and also pointed out to me that police on Kiribati do not even have to carry guns. During our conversation we talked about what it entails to be a police constable on Marakei and about Marakei life in general. Teraoi also mentioned some changes he has seen in the landscape:

“[...] especially around the coast and when you look at the east, some trees are falling down cause the waves eroding the coast.”

Teraoi, as Tebau above, talks about changes in the coastline as the biggest change in Kiribati. Important to note here is that he also links this to a decrease in the vegetation. This can be viewed as another change in the landscape but also as an effect of an earlier landscape change.

Another occasion I met with people to do interviews with, was when I visited the elementary school, next to the place I was staying at. First the principal welcomed me and he introduced me to two of the teachers, Tanua and Atanimoa. As it was a normal school day, I did not want to interrupt the classes so I did my interviews during the break or when the children were working on an assignment. When I was in the teacher Atanimoa’s class, she was teaching the children a song to learn different animals and the sounds they make. A good teacher as she is, she persuaded me to sing along and afterwards I taught the children an animal song I remembered from when I was young. I think this was a good start of a more personal conversation between us. With Tanua and Atanimoa I talked about what it is like to be a teacher in Kiribati and what they think is important for the children to learn. We also talked a bit about life on Marakei and how it might have changed over the years. During that conversation Tanua mentioned that he is worried about the changes he sees in the coastline:

“[...] there’s a lot of erosion. Most of the islands are heavily affected by the big waves, [...] some of the tides are very close by. I think the sea is now very close.”

Again like with Tebau and Teraoi above, the changes in the coastline are the most visible changes for Tanua. This has to do with both erosion of the coastline and tides that come closer. Similar to the way Tebau talks about the ocean, it is very much seen as a threat for the islands. Atanimoa however, talks mostly about changes in the vegetation and changes in the wind when she discusses landscape changes:

“[...] Here on Marakei it is very hot and now in our school we just do gardening and now the water for plants can’t grow up well so it is sad for the plants to not grow up well because there is no water for them. And the wind, there’s no wind.”

In this quote, Atanimoa identifies two changes in the landscape of Marakei. The first one is a decrease in vegetation caused by a temperature change. Another effect of this temperature change is implicated by the mentioning that there is less water for the plants, so from Atanimoas reflection we can assume there is less water in general. The

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19 Rawannawi, Marakei, 16/09/2016
20 Rawannawi, Marakei, 21/09/2016
21 Rawannawi, Marakei, 21/09/2016
second landscape change Atanimoa lists is the change in wind patterns. According to Atanimoa there is no more wind on Marakei. This is the opposite of what Aata mentioned that happens on Abaiang, as stronger winds are there partly responsible for the sea inundation in Tebunginako.

All in all the changes in the landscape on Marakei are similar to the ones in Abaiang. They are mostly changes that happen around the coastal area, that are related to the vegetation on the island, and that are changes in weather and wind patterns.

**Abemama**

Abemama is part of the Central Islands Group of the Gilbert Islands and it is located almost on the equator. The other islands I have visited, Tarawa, Marakei and Abemama, have a more northern location; therefore they are part of the Northern Islands Group of the Gilbert Islands. Because of its proximity to the equator there are some physical differences between Abemama and the other islands. I personally experienced some of these differences: there were fewer trees and more shrubberies, and Abemama also feels hotter than the other islands.

![Illustration 6: Vegetation on Abemama.](image)

People also pointed out some cultural differences. Abemama used to have a king called King Binoka and even though he has been dead for decades, his presence is still felt around the islands. When King Binoka was still alive, many feared him because of how he interacted with other people. Local historians related how, for example, you were not allowed to touch King Binoka or speak about him. King Binoka used spirits to spy on people to ensure that people followed his rules. If someone had a certain skill he wanted, he used the spirits to kill them and to take their skills. When girls had their first menstruation they had to visit King Binoka and lose their virginity to him. According to the legend he would even sleep on a pillow made of their pubic hair. Abemama is still viewed today as the island where they speak about sex the most freely, partly, as many claim, because of all the stories surrounding
King Binoka. Eventually King Binoka was killed by I-Matang, European people. The degree of fear amongst people against King Binoka, is perhaps shown that, according to legend, nobody dared to check his coffin to see if his body was actually in there. Even today you are not allowed to approach his grave because of the spirits surrounding it.

In spite of these physical and cultural differences between Abemama and other islands, residents on Abemama, that I interviewed told me about the same kind of landscape changes as the interviewees on the other islands. They focused mainly on changes in the coastline and in the vegetation. On Abemama I first stayed at the house of the principal of Chevalier College, a catholic high school that has a strong relationship with a high school in Australia. The first days I spent in Chevalier College, the Australian high school was visiting the school, so the guesthouse next to the school was completely full. After three days they went back to Australia, so I moved into the guesthouse. In the guesthouse I met Iacinta who is the owner of the it. Iacinta is originally from the Southern Islands but has been living for a while on Abemama. One evening we got together and we had a long conversation about her life in general and her life on Abemama. During the time she has lived there she noticed some changes in the landscape around her:

“I think sometimes there is more ocean in a place because the place somewhere is what you call it (eroding). The tide is coming and taking away sand and before the tide did not come to a place and now it’s ruining your land, the tide, especially near the ocean side.”

From this quote we learn that coastal erosion is a problem on Abemama as well and that it is more of a problem for the ocean side than for the lagoon side. Stronger tides are seen as the cause for this, as they now come to the places they did not come before. This is not the only change in the landscape Iacinta has observed. She also talks about how there are fewer trees on Abemama now:

“We get sometimes lack of foods in the stores and the people now depend on overseas food like rice and flour and they can neglect growing coconut trees and pandanus, and neglect making their papaya pits.”

However, this decline in the amount of trees in not attributed by Iacinta to higher temperatures or coastal erosion as on Abaiang and Marakei. Iacinta instead points to the introduction and availability of overseas food such as rice or flour. Because people can now just go to the store to buy some food now they do not depend solely on their environment for their survival. According to Iacinta this leads to the fact that less people are now planting and collecting their own food. But, as summarised by Iacinta, the introduction of new food itself can be viewed as a change in the landscape, as it has an effect not only on the way people live but also on their surroundings.

Another person I interviewed on Abemama Island is Keanteang. Keanteang owns a small shop and moved to Abemama around 30 years ago. I first met him when I was looking for some bottled water to buy as the water in the school and in the guesthouse only comes from a well. Everyone had strongly advised me against drinking it. Luckily for me Keanteang had some bottles in his store and on one of my daily visits to him we got talking, a conversation which I expanded into an interview. During our

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22 Binoinano, Abemama, 13/10/2016
conversation Keanteang mentioned that he has noticed some changes in the tide and in the temperature:

“[...] you know the high tide is coming more nowadays and that’s because the climate change. And the sun is very hot.”

Here, Keanteang gives already a cause for the stronger tides, however, and as I will also discuss in Chapter 4.2, Keanteang himself does not believe in climate change. As Keanteang explained to me, he has been taught that climate change is responsible for the changes in the landscape but that does not mean he agrees with it (see below). Despite this scepticism Keanteang, also mentions a change in temperature, something other respondents have also mentioned.

Francis I met when the principal gave me a tour of the school and when I got invited to have a welcome lunch with the teachers of Chevalier College. Francis is the clerk at the school and he also teaches music and religious courses. I went to visit him one of the days afterwards to discuss what he thinks of life in Kiribati. We met again during lunch and he also mentioned the fact that people plant fewer trees now:

“Yeah the changes on this island have to do with the trees, most of the trees are planted a long time ago. There are no new trees.”

Thus, as there is no planting of trees there is no regeneration of trees. But the standing trees are now all “very high” as explained by Francis. Francis also states that “most of Kiribati people cut and groom the trees.” This shows us that although there are fewer trees being planted, access to trees is not a problem at the moment because people on Abemama can still depend on the old trees for resources like coconut and breadfruit. However lack of regeneration could potentially be a problem in the future when the trees die or when they become too high to climb. In addition to the concern for continued provisioning of tree resources needed, when asked about landscape change Francis also brought up the challenge of sea resources. Francis claims that there are fewer fish in the sea right now, saying that:

“There is a problem with the sea when you go fishing. The fish, what can I say, when you go get your food from the sea, there are fewer fish, not a lot.”

Francis here again reminds us of the importance of sea resources, and the problem of declining fish for a fishing dependent community. Changes in the landscape are not only changes on the land but also in the ocean. The decline in fish population is something Aata and Tiri on Abaiang mentioned as well, showing us that this is a bigger problem than a problem just for one island.

4.1.2 Population changes

As mentioned in the Background Chapter, the population of Kiribati has grown in recent years. This especially happened on Tarawa, the main island. On top of normal population growth, people have migrated to Tarawa for different reasons, which I will
discuss in Chapter 4.2. This chapter will therefore focus on Tarawa where population changes often come on top of the changes discussed just before.

**Tarawa**

I spent most of my time in Kiribati on Tarawa Island where I stayed at the Kiribati Health Retreat, an organization that gives workshops on health and that treats people who have for example diabetes. They also rent out some of the rooms for guests visiting. The founder of the organization is Pelenise who is also national coordinator of the Kiribati Climate Action Network (KiriCAN). She is the person I contacted before I came to Kiribati and she helped me set up my research. Pelenise and the other girls working at the Health Retreat, Tinaai, Vasiti, Kinaua and Tetiria, also assisted me during the process of my research and without them I could have made the contacts necessary to carry out the research for the thesis. Pelenise is one of the most driven women I have ever met and I was privileged enough to spend many days and evenings in her company. On one of these occasions she described some of the changes she has seen during her time on Tarawa:

“[…] there are places that have I noticed that have grown and there places that have been washed away. […] There is a lot of deposit of land in this place and very soon we won’t have the sea wall, it is going to be just land you know. But on other places, totally gone. People living there sitting, I mean their home of the people has just washed away. Even though they keep on trying to build sea walls. It just got washed.”

Interesting here is that Pelenise not only talks about land that has washed away but also about land that has been created by the use of for example sea walls. However these sea walls are not effective in every place as some of the tides are too strong for them. She also points to “the currents and the tides” to explain why this happened. I will discuss the various explanations of landscape changes more in Chapter 4.2.

Ieru is a carpenter I met when I accompanied the girls from the Health Retreat to one of the outreach programs they do in Betio. Betio is the largest urban area in Kiribati. The Health Retreat program is focused on people with diabetes who during four days, learn how to eat well and how to exercise more. Ieru joined the Health Retreat program because he wants to improve his quality of life and he wants to be able to be there more for his children. As Ieru’s English was not very good, Vasiti offered to translate for him during the interview. During our conversation Ieru mentioned some changes in the landscape of Tarawa:

“Before we have space and we have a space for a backyard and to do gardens. Now every house are packed together and everyone lives closely to each other. You have little space and you have little privacy. And people living together, with the usage of water just dumping it everywhere, it makes the place untidy and not a pleasant place to live. So yeah compared to when I first arrived until today, yeah it’s getting overcrowded and it’s getting untidy.”

Here Ieru mentions the effects population growth has on the landscape, it forces people to live more closely together and they are often no longer able to grow their own food. Because of the increase in population density, Tarawa becomes more and

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28 Temwaiku, South Tarawa, 23/10/2016
29 Betio, South Tarawa, 08/09/2016
more polluted. Later in the interview Ieru mentions two other changes that are related to population changes. The first one has to do with the lack of toilets on Tarawa:

“Because everywhere is so populated and there is not enough space for the toilets. Some people they don’t have a toilet so they go to the sea and that makes it so disgusting and so unhygienic.”

Again changes in population also cause more pollution. In this case the pollution does not happen in the urban areas themselves but on the beaches surrounding them. On the outer islands using the sea as a toilet is not a problem because there are not as many people. On Tarawa, however, the lack of toilets is becoming a big problem as, especially during low tide, beaches are very dirty. A second effect a growing population in a smaller area is related to an increased unemployment:

“Our government does not have enough resources for everyone, to employ each individual. So unemployment as well is a big issue. And then that drives especially the youth, it drives them to do mischievous things and it’s sad that here in Tarawa there have been a lot of people who have been doing things like abusing people. Maybe they are stressed because they don’t have jobs so it leads to a lot of things, problems. Especially in Betio.”

The increase in unemployment is something I will discuss in Chapter 6 as well. Important to note here is that Ieru links unemployment to especially male violence. People I have talked to pointed to domestic abuse as one of the main crimes in Kiribati. Often they mentioned it in combination with the use of alcohol. Apart from the effects of population changes and unemployment, Ieru also specifically discussed the physical changes of the coastline:

“The rising sea levels take away our land and our water and also for health it is threatening. The ocean and the water is polluted, you know, on Kiribati we have a limestone soil, so there is not a lot of water and the seawater pollutes it. You know it is only a small island and only around 2-3 m high with water everywhere. There is nowhere to go for us, we are trapped.”

This again shows us that the rapid population growth come on top of physical changes in the landscape that exist on the outer islands as well. The coastline is eroding and fresh water wells are subject to salinization. What to me is most striking from the conversation with Ieru is his phrasing how they are “trapped” on the island. When the water comes in they have nowhere to go.

People from other islands, like Iacinta from Abemama, who was quoted above, talk about how Tarawa is overcrowded at the moment and that it is better for people who have migrated to Tarawa to move back to the outer islands. If people moved back to their original island, they would be able to provide for themselves again. On Abemama Iacinta stated that:

“It’s good that they are coming back because they are all packing up Tarawa and crowding up all the places and people. The way the people live in Tarawa is

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30 Betio, South Tarawa, 08/09/2016
31 Betio, South Tarawa, 08/09/2016
32 Betio, South Tarawa, 08/09/2016
too hard for them. It’s just the main money they just get it from the wages they get, no other. It’s better for them to come back here.”

Not only Tarawa residents is feeling the effects of population changes on other islands but it also creates some problems for people on the outer islands. Most of the people that migrate to Tarawa do not come back.

Illustration 7: Urban area in Betio, South Tarawa.

4.2 Causes of changes

Here I describe how the people I have interviewed explain the changes they saw in the landscape. I used the same kind of division as in the previous chapter: a divide between sea inundation and temperature changes, and population changes.

4.2.1 Sea inundation and temperature changes

Most respondents declare that they do not know why the changes they see are happening. They notice that the sea level is rising and that it is getting hotter but they don’t know why. Aata gives an example of how he notices it is getting hotter:

“Because we feel that the sun is very hot and we see the trees, because the earth is very dry so it affects the production of the plants. Also for the fish too. It is very hot in the sea.”

In this way a rise temperature explains a change in vegetation and a decline in the fish population. The temperature rise is thus a cause of landscape changes but what causes

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33 Binoinano, Abemama, 13/10/2016
34 Tebunginako, Abaiang, 02/10/2016
it is unknown. In the previous chapter, people like Tebua and Tanua have pointed to stronger tides to explain erosion of the coastline. However the reasons why the tides are stronger is something most people are hesitant to say, or they say they do not know.

Only a few individuals point to global climate change as the cause for the physical changes in the landscape. Even those individuals that do mention global climate change stress that they are not sure if it is actually the reason or if there are other factors at play as well. Pelenise from Tarawa is one the few that brings up global climate change saying that it could be the reason parts of Tarawa are being washed away, but she also adds:

“[…] there is a lot of coastal erosion a lot of places have been washed and because I am not scientist I couldn’t tell you whether it’s all climate change or it’s man’s made doing, but maybe we did something to create that but I know.”

Pelenise suggest that coastal erosion could be caused by climate change or something else man made but that it may also be a natural phenomenon. Important to remember here is that Pelenise also stressed how people were creating more land by using sea walls. This shows us the idea that people can be responsible for both decreasing and increasing the size of the islands

Iacinta from Abemama also mentioned climate change as a possibility when I asked her why she thought the landscape was changing:

“We don’t know why it is changing but maybe because of the changing of the climate, maybe.”

As many other informants, Iacinta is not entirely convinced that climate change is responsible for the landscape changes. Iacinta tells me she heard about climate change when she helped her niece out with an assignment on the topic. As mentioned before, the way Iacinta thinks about climate change, is similar to the way Keanteang thinks about it, although he declares that he does not believe in it at all. He commented the physical changes saying that it could be climate change, but adding that:

“…we don’t believe in climate change. They say the islands are going to disappear, that’s what the scientists say.”

It is noticeable that many informants talk about global climate change as something “you believe in or not”. As I have shown above, many people recognise the physical effects of landscape changes (flooding, salinization of freshwater, loss of vegetation). People also speak about warming, and claim the experience that temperatures now are becoming hotter. It is also clear that most individuals are aware of that the outside world explains these processes in terms of global warming and climate change. Yet, many informants are hesitant whether the believe climate change is happening.

There are several reasons why people do not believe in climate change or why they are not completely convinced climate change is real. For residents, the knowledge that their island and everything they have will sink in a not so distant future is simply too frightening and overwhelming. People have also expressed that they believe that once

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35 Temwaiku, South Tarawa, 23/10/2016
36 Binoinano, Abemama, 13/10/2016
37 Binoinano, Abemama 13/10/2016
they think climate change is real it will become real. Denying its existence is for them a way of coping with it.

Manikaoti is manager of the Kiribati Adaptation Program, a program that assists the Kiribati government to adapt to and create more resilience to climate change. The interview I did with Manikaoti differs from the other interviews as this one was aimed at getting a better understanding of the organization. Manikaoti is thus conversing with me as a representative of KAP. The other interviews I conducted were more styled as personal conversations in which we talked more broadly about everyday life in Kiribati. When I was talking to Manikaoti Timeon, the manager of the Kiribati Adaptation Program, he pointed to politics to explain why people do not believe in global climate change:

“That is a political problem. Before this new government came into power in March, they were the opposition in the previous government. And the previous government was very much promoting climate change [as a problem], as you can see the president Anote Tong was very vocal on this topic. Not only here but also in the region and on the international forum. And then when this present government was the opposition, I think they believed that climate change is a reality but [use it as] just a political thing to go against the [the sitting] government. But you can see if you talk to them now, they have changed side you know, they have changed their mind and they are now very supportive of climate change.”

Manikaoti blames the current government for scepticism towards climate change. However, now that they are in the government they are taking measures against climate change. Manikaoti has hopes that in the future, people of Kiribati might have a better understanding of why certain things that are happening to their island. A few of the people I interviewed were in contrast very convinced that global climate change was responsible for some of the landscape change. For example Tanua explicitly refers to climate change to explain the coastal erosion he witnesses on Marakei:

“I think it is climate change, as you can see there’s a lot of erosion. Most of the islands are heavily affected by the big waves.”

Here Tanua points to climate change to explain bigger waves and stronger tides. The waves and tides are responsible for the coastal erosion but climate change is responsible for the waves and tides.

To conclude, when it comes to explaining coastal and temperature changes, the people I have interviewed can be divided into three groups: a group of people who are reluctant to explain or do not know why these changes happen; a group of people that thinks climate change is partly or fully responsible for these changes and a last group of people that has been told that climate change is responsible for them, but refuse to believe it.

4.2.2 Population changes

As discussed above, population changes are mostly visible on Tarawa: this is due to a natural population growth and an increased migration flow to Tarawa from the outer island. There are several reasons why people decide to move to Tarawa but the most

38 Bairiki, South Tarawa, 18/10/2016
39 Rawannawi, Marakei, 21/09/2016
common reasons are for education and employment. Tarawa has a wider variety of jobs and schools are often deemed better than the ones on the outer islands. In some cases families also follow their children who have previously migrated there, this is something Tebuntintaake from Abaiang describes:

“Because some of them, some of the families their kids stay in Tarawa for school so they move to them.”

Though people migrate to Tarawa for jobs, many families become disappointed as unemployment rises as well. People moving to get jobs often end up without. This causes them to become dependent on their relatives living in Tarawa. Pelenise discusses this in our conversation:

“The parents [of the unemployed youth] are on the outer islands but they [the youth] are staying here with their uncles and their aunties who are working on Tarawa who are maybe providing all the needs. All the things that they need but with the understanding that these kids will try and look for a job or go back to study. And the unemployment also causes a lot of stress on those who are working on Tarawa because all their family members and the children, they send the children to come and live with them and to support them while they are here.”

In this quote Pelenise mentions why the children moved to Tarawa, for jobs or education, and she also mentions some of the effects the migration has. Relatives become burdened with the task of looking after the children and making sure they have everything they need. In Chapter 4.1.2. Ieru also talked about what the unemployment can do to the youth. Ieru himself actually moved to Tarawa to find a good job and to give his children the opportunity to go to school in Tarawa. After I conducted the interview with Manikaoti, we had an informal talk afterwards in which we discussed the population issue on Tarawa. Manikaoti mentioned that usually the people moving to Tarawa do not have a lot of resources because they are unemployed. So they either have to be supported by relatives on Tarawa or they have to buy their own piece of land. However the pieces of land that are still available are often located in areas vulnerable to flooding and the houses regularly get flooded.

As mentioned in Chapter 4.1.2 the decrease in youth population on the outer islands because of the migration to Tarawa can become a problem on the outer islands as well. The current government is trying to tackle the population issue by giving incentives to people to move back to their original islands. For example, they have recently doubled the price of copra (that is dried coconut flesh) to encourage copra production and provide a livelihood in smaller islands. A bag of one kilo copra used to fetch 50 cents, while now producers receive one dollar through government grants. Iacinta mentioned this livelihood opportunity when I was talking with her:

“[...]now they are getting more money from copra because the way, the prices getting high. They are getting, they receive much money from the kilo. Before it’s only 50 cent a kilo and now it’s two dollar a kilo. [...] You know people who leave their island they all go to Tarawa and now they are returning back because of the change of the copra, the price of the copra.”

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40 Tebunginako, Abaiang, 04/10/2016
41 Temwaiku, South Tarawa, 23/10/2016
42 Binoinano, Abemama, 13/10/2016
Here Iacinta mentions people migrating to Tarawa from Abemama. She also discusses them coming back because now they can make more money selling copra. Not everyone is happy with the new price either. Some residents fear, people will move back to outer islands, harvest all the copra and then move to Tarawa again. The government measure could potentially lead to a decrease of the population of Tarawa and an increase of the population of the outer islands but as the measure was only implemented last year (2016) it is too early to make any judgements on it.

In an informal conversation I had with a shopkeeper in Tarawa on the second of September, he related the increase to population to climate change as well. As the islands are getting smaller because of coastal erosion or sea inundations, people have less space to live and are forced to live closer together. In his case his family was now living with the pigs inside the house. Although not an explanation for why the population growth, it can be one for the increase in population density.
5. Identity

People living in Kiribati base their identity on different sources. Respondents mentioned community, landscape, and values as important to their identity. When people of Kiribati talk about themselves and their culture, they usually use the term I-Kiribati. This in contrast to I-Matang, which means Europeans or Westerners. I-Matang originally means ‘people from the heavens’ and according to the creation story I-Matang and I-Kiribati were never supposed to live in the same country (Beiabure et al 1979). When I was talking to Atanea, an elder from Abaiang, he discussed some of these aspects of identity and related them to each other:

“[…] And we need to die here because we don’t change our culture. Because once you move to another country your identity, your cultural concepts will be changed you know, in future times. Because you have to follow foreign culture and here is simple.”

Here Atanea mentions that culture is tied to your country, your nationality. Another country will not have the same “cultural concepts” as Kiribati. Related to this is what he mentions as the “simple” life in Kiribati. In Kiribati it is possible to provide for yourself without having a job because you still can collect your own food from your surroundings:

“Living in Kiribati is simple compared to other countries like if you go there and sometimes you might don’t have a job, no money, you end up in the street like begging for money. But here if you have no money you can get food easily.”

Atanea notes that in Kiribati you do not need money to buy food. If you have no money you can still survive without having to beg on the street. For Atanea this monetary independence makes life easier and simpler than in other countries. Monetary independence is also part of the Kiribati identity. You do not have to go to a store to buy your food, on the contrary you can just find it around you. Another issue related to Kiribati identity was brought up by Tebero, and is that people in Kiribati will always help each other:

“[…] or people here, we can help each other. In your system it is very hard to go to your neighbour, they might close their doors and chase you away.”

This identity trait is related to the community aspect of Kiribati culture. Everyone helps each other; if you need something, you can go and ask your neighbour for help. This community support is also related to the idea that life is simple in Kiribati. The community ties make life simpler as well because even if you do not have money you can still go to someone else for help. Again you do not end up begging on the street for money. An interesting note here is that when discussing Kiribati culture and

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43 Tebero, Abaiang, 26/09/2016
44 Tebero, Abaiang, 26/09/2016
45 Tebero, Abaiang, 26/09/2016
identity, Atanea compares them to other countries’ identities and cultures as a way of explaining what Kiribati is about. As Woodward (1997:2) and Gilroy (1997: 301-302) mentioned, this is strategy to define identity (see Chapter 3). I will discuss all these aspects of Kiribati identity and culture more in detail in this chapter. I have decided to divide the chapter in three parts: a community part, a landscape part and a values part. These were the three main aspects/themes that came out of the interviews, conversations and observations. Important to keep in mind here is that this is a generalisation based on the answers of the respondents. This is not a full representation about what it means to be I-Kiribati as this varies even for the islanders themselves.

5.1 Community

Community is an important part of Kiribati identity. Respondents defined community usually as a church group or a village community in which everyone helps each other. A woman I talked to on Abaiang mentioned that the way communities are organized now on Tarawa helps people who have migrated there. She herself is a nurse who grew up on the Southern islands, but then moved to Tarawa to enroll in nursing school. She talked about how before your community usually consists of the people living around you and your family. However now communities are increasingly centered around the church. This can help people from other islands to not feel alone and to still have a structure they can fall back on in their new home. On Tarawa there are also different maneabas, or community centers. Some of these maneabas were also linked to local maneabas in the outer islands. These outer island community centers enable people who migrated to still connect with people from their original island and their customs.

My conversation with Tiria on Abaiang, took place at their church community center so naturally we discussed what her church community means to her:

“"Our community is, because this place is a catholic community, it consists of members of the church, members of the Catholic Church in this village. So in our community we have a catechist and his wife and this is their home. So every time we come here and meet. Every Sunday we have a meeting and in our meeting we talk about looking after the village, the big house and fundraising for the church.”\(^{46}\)

Here Tiria mentions two aspects of her community: the first one is that it is a church community that consists of member of the Catholic Church is their village. Because it is a church community they get together in the house of the catechist and his wife. The second aspect is that they have a big meeting every week on Sunday in which they discuss what needs to be done in their village and how to collect money for the church. During this meeting they can ask for some help for their household, for instance in building a house. Tiria also mentioned a second way community members may help individuals:

“"In our community we also have like a money scheme in which we can apply for a loan. It’s not a big loan, the money they have now is almost 1000 dollars and if you need to borrow some money they give you 50, 20 and by next week

\(^{46}\) Tebero, Abaiang, 26/09/2016
you have to pay back with interest. That’s one of the ways to help their members.”

Tiria explains here that they can also apply for a small loan. In Tiria’s community, they have collected in total a sum of almost 1000 dollars that can be used to grant loans to community members. If you receive a loan, you have to pay it back by the next week but with a small interest. As there are almost no banks in Kiribati, this can be a good way to help people set up small businesses or to help them out when they need money urgently because of an unforeseen problem.

When I talked to Aata about what community means to him, he gave a similar description of the importance of community, but Aata also defined community in a broader sense focusing on various community associations:

“In our community there are a lot of associations, like church associations, village association, youth and women. In the village association, you know it’s all the people in the village. In the maneaba if we, if the leader or the people ask for us to do this one thing, everyone should do this one thing. Like if the leader say today we are going to build that house so everyone obey the rule and everyone should work together to build the thing what the leader said. As well as the church, if we do fundraising for the church everyone should help the fundraising. And the community for us is like this, what do you call it, combination of different associations in one area. So we have each other to do this one thing, to do things.”

Here Aata mentions that for him a community is made up of different associations, giving examples of the village association and the church association. He also talks about some of the activities and roles that the different associations have. When the village association meet in the maneaba, they discuss things that need to be done in the village, Aata gives building a house as an example. Ultimately it is the leader of the village association, often an elder, who decides on what activities will be carried out. To illustrate what the church association does, Aata gives the example of fundraising. Everyone will try to collect some money to for example to do some repairs on the church. Similar to what Tiria discussed, we can see the element of people in the community helping each other present in Aata’s description. One respondent, Tebuntintaake from Abaiang, makes a good general description that combines the different elements that make up a community:

“Community means a place to live and to have meetings and a community is a place a combination of households. A place to meet, to make decisions and live.”

Tebuntintaake defines community both as a function, but also by who makes up the community. A community is a combination of households tied to “a place to live”. The function or purpose of the community is, according to Tebuntintaake, to meet, to make joint decisions and to help each other out. The quote from Tebuntintaake above is highly interesting as he also defines community as “a place to live”. Thus community is localised and tied to a place, many of the respondents also fear that if they have to move to other places they will lose what they define as community, which is also relevant to their definitions of themselves as individuals (see Chapter 6)

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47 Tebunginako, Abaiang, 02/10/2016
48 Tebunginako, Abaiang, 04/10/2016
However, communities also have another important element that has not yet been mentioned, namely the love and friendship that exist between different members of the community. Without it communities would not be able to function the way they do. For people in Kiribati the idea that your family is bigger than just core family is also an important aspect of their identity. When I asked Atanea what he would miss about Kiribati if he lived in another country, he described the love that exists on Kiribati:

“Because here love is very important. You have to love one another and if you go there, because if you live overseas, there is only you. Maybe your wife or husband or children but very close house. So you know the love that you share here, you know it will disappear. So you have to love only your husband or your family but your neighbours will not. And here, sometimes people when you walk around here they are like come have a drink and a smoke you know. That’s the life we have to maintain the friendship face, especially the smiling face. And if you go there it’s going to disappear.”

Atanea mentions that in Kiribati everyone is always very friendly towards each other. When you walk on the street people will invite you over for dinner or for a conversation. The idea exists that your neighbours are part of your family. Because your neighbours are part of your family, it is easier to go them and to ask for help when you need it. He also puts this in contrast again to life overseas where all of this will disappear. Aata also mentioned love and friendship toward your neighbours, as an integral part of Kiribati culture and Kiribati communities:

“Because normally here people are social, you can go to your neighbours and talk. Sometimes the people in the village gather together in the maneaba to have meetings to discuss things there. [...] Love in Kiribati is one of the most important in our culture. You have to smile to people, show love, help each other.”

Aata mentions here that love and friendship is important to keep the communities going. People should feel that they can go visit their neighbours or that when they need something they can go to the maneaba to discuss it. Important to remember here is that communities are not only about people helping each other out, community associations are also a place in which people can just meet and hang out. The community associations are also not closed but other people can join in on activities as well. Tanua mentioned how the love and friendship is extended to visitors:

“First when we receive visitors from outside we really welcome them. There are really other cultures that you can entertain in the maneaba, dancing, maybe handicrafts, local things I guess.”

Here Tanua talks about how visitors are always welcomed. Tanua also mentions that they are invited to join community events such as dancing and making local handicrafts. This shows that communities are open to outsiders as well. As a visitor in Kiribati I felt this welcoming spirit. Walking around on the various Kiribati islands you can feel this sense of community and the love that respondents talk about.

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49 Tebero, Abaiang, 26/09/2016
50 Tebunginako, Abaiang, 02/10/2016
51 Rawannawi, Marakei, 21/09/2016
Anyone may greet you on the street or invite you over to have dinner with them. On several occasions I was also invited to take part in community activities. For example one time I went to a community meeting on Marakei in which they also sang their traditional songs and danced their traditional dances. The whole village came together to eat, celebrate and discuss village issues. Another opportunity for me to appreciate the community spirit was when I was travelling between the different islands. Airports are social places in Kiribati where people come together to meet and to send some dried fish or coconut to relatives on different islands. A different example of their welcoming spirit is that every time someone from a different island or country visits a certain island, a welcome dinner will be thrown in their honour to which important members of the community are invited. The maneabas also play a function for solving unexpected crises: on Tarawa some people even live in the maneabas because their homes have become overcrowded due to population issues as discussed in Chapter 4. These examples show us that communities are a vital part of the identity of the individuals I have spoken with. Without communities Kiribati would simply not be Kiribati, as many of them mentioned.

5.2 Landscape

As discussed in Chapter 3, landscape and identity are closely linked together. Cultural practices, knowledge, rituals, etc. are being passed on in and through the landscape. Landscapes can be viewed as expressions of cultural identities that are encoded with cultural forms (Ingold 2000: 21; Strang 2008: 51-52). This means that people will derive some part of their identity from the landscape around them. During my time in Kiribati, in the interviews I did and in informal conversations I had, I discovered that for many people in Kiribati the landscape around them is an important aspect of their culture and of their identity. As mentioned in Chapter 4, landscape is usually defined by physical surroundings both on the islands and the marine areas surrounding the islands. For that reason, from the perspective of Kiribati respondents landscape and environment can be used as synonymous. People on Kiribati get their food from the landscape, the landscape is intimately connected to certain landscape practices, and people pass on traditional skills such as cutting toddy through it. Important to remember here is that people in Kiribati very much depend on the landscape for their livelihoods. Many people I met and talked do not have jobs but get their food and their income from their surroundings. They go fishing or collect things like coconut and breadfruit. The two main sources of local monetary income, copra (eg dried coconut flesh) and fishing, are also directly derived from the landscape. This is especially true for the outer islands, where most people live on incomes or resources generated locally from natural resources. During my conversation with Ieru, at one point he paused to exemplify why the landscape or the environment around him is so important to him:

“The environment is very important to us, we depend on it for our livelihood. The fish in the sea, the trees,… When I was young my father taught me how to make the toddy and to preserve it so it becomes sweet toddy and how I can feed my wife and children from it. It is important for passing on traditional skills like that. The relationship with the environment is a very important one.”

52 Betio, South Tarawa, 08/09/2016
Ieru mentions that he and his family depend on the environment for their livelihood. They get fish from the seas, and fruit and coconut from the trees. This subsistence dependence is not the only reason why the environment is important to him. Ieru feels that he can pass on traditional skills (like cutting toddy) through the environment as well. All of this makes his relationship with the physical landscape and the locality a very important one. The similar relationship was decribed by Tanua, who stressed why the environment is important to him:

“We depend on the plants like coconut trees, we get our living from those kind of trees. Breadfruit trees, it is very important to take care of them.”

Here, Tanua explains that the landscape is important to him because they depend on it for their food and living. Some trees are important because they provide food, like breadfruit trees. Other trees like coconut trees and pandanus trees are also important in for example building kia kias (local huts) or weaving mats.

Illustration 8: Kia kias on Marakei.

The possibility of living of your own food is also something I-Kiribati are proud of, as is shown in the quotes presented in Chapter 4. Looking at local food production from the perspective of some of the informants, it is not a necessity but rather a privilege. The privilege of being able to produce your own food is related to the idea that in Kiribati life is simple. One of the individuals I talked to, Tokanikai, explains why he is proud of being able to live from the surroundings:

“The food in Kiribati, in Kiribati we don’t have to buy food. For fish you can go fishing, breadfruit and other things. But I think in the other side, I mean the people from the other side they have to buy food and in Kiribati we don’t have to buy food. I mean coconut you can get and you don’t have to buy it.”

53 Rawannawi, Marakei, 21/09/2016
54 Binoinano, Abemama, 13/10/2016
The fact that people in Kiribati do not have to buy food gives them financial freedom. They do not have to have a job in order to get money in order to get it; people can just collect it from their surroundings. I argue that because of this local self-sufficiency (and interdependence on environment), the landscape is an important part of Kiribati identity. However as mentioned in Chapter 4, this dependence is decreasing as imported food such as rice and flour becomes widely available. Tokanikai talks about this when discussing food production during our conversation. He mentions some of the kinds of food that have been introduced in Kiribati:

“Different people, I-Matang come to Kiribati. They introduce a sort of food like rice, meat, all sort of things.”

Rice has become one of the main ingredients of meals and flour and sugar are also becoming widespread. The few restaurants that exist on Tarawa are often Chinese restaurants that sell food like fried rice and chicken curry. Thus, especially on Tarawa, many are no longer dependent on locally produced food. Pelenise once told me the story of when people used to go to Banaba or Nauru to mine phosphate for the United Kingdom, half their salary was paid in boxes of biscuits and corned beef. Often this was too much for the employees to consume solely by themselves so they sent some home to their families. This created a dependency on corned beef and other canned meat, giving it the status of luxury Western food and rendering it an important part of the Kiribati diet. In Chapter 4 Iacinta pointed out that the availability of overseas food in shops could lead to a neglect of trees formerly used for food such as coconut trees.

As discussed above, the landscape is also important for passing on traditional skills like for instance cutting toddy (as Ieru already mentioned). Cutting toddy is usually viewed as something men do. Women traditionally carry out and are responsible for passing on other traditional skills, like for instance weaving mats from pandanus. Kaaibo mentions this:

“I learn a lot of things like weaving the mats to sleep on, how to make ropes and how to cultivate the papaya.”

The skills she mentioned, liking weaving mats, making ropes and cultivating papaya are skills she learned from her parents and she will pass them on to her children as well. This shows to me that without the surroundings people in which I-Kiribati grew up, traditional know-how would be lost. In Chapter 3, I already gave the example of how for Pelenise traditional knowledge is important part of being I-Kiribati. Most of this knowledge is stored in the landscape as it is practical knowledge that makes you resilient and that teaches you the Kiribati way. Pelenise showed me some of this knowledge by pointing out the different kind of coconut trees and the different purposes they serve.

To conclude, the landscape can be viewed as important aspect of Kiribati identity for several reasons. The first one is that people in Kiribati still mostly depend on the land for their livelihoods. A second reason is that the fact that they can rely on the landscape for their livelihoods, which fits in with the narrative of a “simple life”, self-sufficiency is a matter of pride and part of the identity of being a Kiribati Islander.

55 Binoinano, Abemama, 13/10/2016
56 Tebunginako, Abaiang, 04/10/2016
The last reason is that their traditional knowledge and many of their traditional skills are embedded in the landscape around them.

5.3 Kiribati Values

A third important part of Kiribati culture and identity are the social norms and values that they community shares. During my conversations with respondents, they often mentioned things like having respect for elders and living a peaceful, simple life. A third value, virginity, came up in interviews and conversations, and took me by surprise at first. It was mentioned and stressed by many informants and I therefore think it is important to bring up here. In this part I will give some examples of how people brought these values up, and of how they were defined as important by the respondents.

5.3.1 Respect for elders

Elders are still regarded as wise and important people and often they lead the community meetings in the maneaba. When an important event takes place, such as the celebration of a girl’s first menstruation, elders will always be invited along with church leaders, government officials and I-Matang. Previously, it used to be only the old men who took up the position of chief in society, but in recent years more and more women are invited to discuss community meetings as well. As discussed in Chapter 2, elders have always had an important position in the community. During my conversation with Pelenise from Tarawa, she mentioned the importance of having respect for elders:

“And our values are the elders, the values we have are rules we have for the boys and the girls, the elders, parents, you know. Things are changing but I know for our Kiribati culture we have very strong rootings you know, some things are very strong for us.”

Here Pelenise stress that everyone has a certain role to play in the community and that these things are difficult to change. We can also learn that the respect for the elders is one of the most important values in Kiribati society. It is a strong value that goes back centuries. The importance of respect for elders is something Tebuntintaake mentions as well:

“Respect, the culture is one of respect for elderly people. That’s one of our main aspects of our culture.”

As stated by these individuals respect for elders is one the key aspects of Kiribati culture and identity. When I was talking with Ieru, he also discussed in more detail what this respect for elders actually entails:

“The most important part of our culture is respect. And I think that’s what defines me as a person. Cause everywhere I go, I know that there are people whom I have to respect which are elders. Our elders they are the ones who are the chiefs and are highly respected here in the community. Even when a boss is

57 Temwaiku, South Tarawa, 23/10/2016
58 Tebunginako, Abaiang, 04/10/2016
younger than the people working for him, he will still have some respect, some way of acting towards them. That is a very important part of the Kiribati culture.”

Ieru mentions that elders should always be respected, even though you have a higher working position than the elder in question. He also talks about that they are the chiefs of the community. For him respect goes deeper than display, respect for elders is part of him and defines him as a person. As mentioned before, the respected position of elders in Kiribati communities is something that is very noticeable as well. When important visitors arrive the elders are the ones that welcome them and during traditional events they will almost always receive a flower crown as well, as a sign of blessings.

From all of this we can conclude that respect for elders is an important part of Kiribati identity and culture. However some people expressed fears that this respect might now be disappearing for several reasons. For instance, when talking with Pelenise about what effect climate change and migration would have on Kiribati identity, she mentioned that Kiribati identity will disappear and that “soon we won’t have the time for our elders” (see also Chapter 6). In my conversations with Ieru he also raised this problem and connected youth unemployment with less respect for elders:

“Young people are just laying around and they do not have a lot of respect for the elders anymore.”

The issue of loss of respect for elders and also unemployment will be discussed more thoroughly in Chapter 6.

5.3.2 Peaceful and simple life

As discussed before, many respondents mentioned how easy and simple living in Kiribati is. As I have already talked about in Chapter 5.2, the fact that people can just survive on the things they find in their surroundings also forms a base of the ideal of the simple life. On many islands people do not need jobs, which gives them a high degree of freedom. This freedom is seen as part of an ideal and what identifies the “simple life”. However self-sufficiency is not the only reason why people view life in Kiribati as simple and peaceful. I have already discussed another aspect of this as well when I was writing about community in Chapter 5.1. For example, because you can ask your neighbours for help, begging does not exist in Kiribati as Atanimoa has mentioned. Another important part of the peacefulness is the fact that Kiribati does not have a lot of natural threats such as for instance hurricanes, and there are no threats from other countries either. This is something Tiria mentioned during my conversation with her:

“I am proud to be Kiribati because of life here is simple [...] Life here is simple and also, like, we don’t have terrorists, you know, terrorists or like natural hazards like cyclones only the rising sea level. That’s it.”

Tiria defines the rising sea level as the only threat to Kiribati, other than that Kiribati is pretty safe and peaceful place to live in. The historical absence of any natural threats or human conflicts, make life in Kiribati a simple one. As mentioned in

59 Betio, South Tarawa, 08/09/2016
60 Betio, South Tarawa, 08/09/2016
61 Tebero, Abaiang, 26/09/2016
Chapter 4, the two prison cells on Marakei were almost always empty and the police constables noted that there rarely was some kind of violence. Pelenise mentioned another factor that also defines the simple life:

“And one thing I found with Kiribati it is a very stable government. We have politicians and politics is strong but it is quite stable compared to other countries.

Pelenise feels that she can trust her government to make the right decisions, this is important in creating a feeling of security in a country. Same as Tiria, Pelenise thinks Kiribati is a great place to live and has a bright future ahead, but adds that this may all be changing now with the threat of the rising sea levels and global climate change. This also shows something that I discussed in Chapter 4.2, it is not because people know climate change exists, they think it will have a big influence on their life. It is something that is happening, but that for now does not threaten their lives a lot.

Another aspect of what makes life in Kiribati simple is the absence of violence in Kiribati. For example, police in Kiribati do not carry guns because it is not necessary. Of course there is some violence also in Kiribati. Ieru mentioned already that young unemployed people often get aggressive and most people I have talked to point to the use of alcohol as the main cause for violence if it takes place. When I talked to Aata he also discussed what Kiribati made a safe place:

“I am proud to be a Kiribati because here it is very safe. No guns, bomb, no terrorists here. I live longer here because I eat fresh things like fruit and the fish, not the chemical things, and that’s why I am healthy. I am working hard for to feed ourselves and the food we eat is organic food, it’s natural.”

Aata says that Kiribati is a peaceful place to live in because there are no human threats like guns or terrorists. An important part of the simple life that is mentioned here again is the food that comes from the surroundings.

Concluding on the peaceful and simple life as an ideal and as a reality, life in Kiribati is simple because you can always rely on your surroundings for your survival. If you do have a problem, you can always go to your neighbour or family for help. Kiribati is a safe place to live in because there are no natural or human threats, except for climate change but that is not viewed as a major problem yet. The government of Kiribati is viewed as a stable government, which only enhances the feeling of being safe.

5.3.3 Virginity

When you get married in Kiribati it is important that you are still a virgin. This is a value that came up during some of the interviews and in informal conversations as well. When it came up, women were the ones who brought it up. For example, when I was talking to some girls on Abemama they mentioned that if your husband finds out that you are not a virgin on your wedding night, he can send you back to your family with or without clothes. Your family then can beat you for the shame you brought upon them. Related to this, it is important that you always cover your body enough to preserve it.

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Tebunginako, Abaiang, 02/10/2016
Important to note here is that most of the Kiribati Islanders live in a patriarchal society; when women get married, they do not belong to their family anymore but they belong to the family of their husband. On Banaba however, people live in a matriarchal society. When people marry there, the husband moves in with his wife who stays with her family to look after them. It also means that the daughters of the family inherit the land and property. I will here give two examples of women who mentioned that virginity is an important part of Kiribati identity. The first woman is Tebwebwe, I met her when I went to a football tournament in Buariki. The government tries to encourage young people to play sports as this gives them something to do and stops them from “just hanging around and drinking alcohol” as people told me. As Tebwebwe was at the time running for election to the village council, she was there to campaign for herself. Right now she works at the Ministry of Finance and she is married and has two children. Tebwebwe brought up the importance of virginity when we were discussing Kiribati culture.

“Our culture is based on the American culture, you know that our culture is depending on the virginity. That is the first marriage and I am a lady or a boy or a man I will be a virgin. That is our culture.”

For Tebwebwe, the value of virginity is one that has its origins outside of Kiribati. When the missionaries first came, they introduced clothing in Kiribati as before, as Tebwebwe say “they were only wearing leaves”. Tebwebwe raise the possibility that missionaries also introduced the concept of virginity. This, as Tebwebwe says, is just a speculation, as nobody I have interviewed has any memories (or have shared memories with elders) from before the missionaries came. Tebwebwe also points out is that the virginity rule also applies to boys or men. However, in practice, it is only the woman that is tested for it by looking if she bleeds on the wedding night.

Another respondent who mentioned the importance of virginity is Iacinta from Abemama. She explains that when you are a virgin you “shouldn’t have to go by yourself or you shouldn’t go out with boys.” Here again we see that in practice the virginity rule mostly exists for girls, while in theory it also applies to boys. Iacinta also explained why it is so important that you are a virgin at the time of your wedding:

“When you are getting married, you have to be checked if you are a virgin or not because your family would have to spend most of their time preparing the wedding and if you are a virgin, all your families will come and they give all their efforts for your party and they are happy to spend the time doing everything for the party.”

Being a virgin, as Iacinta explains it, is important because your family will put a lot of effort in preparing the wedding building on the trust of the purity of you as a bride. If you are not a virgin, you have broken that trust and thereby, insulted your family and the time they spent on your wedding. Thus being a virgin when married is related to the pride and love of your family. Iacinta also points to the church for the importance of the virginity because “it’s the rules of the church to do that and that.” This can support the assumption that the missionaries brought this value with them.

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63 Buariki, South Tarawa, 10/09/2016  
64 Binoinano, Abemama, 13/10/2016  
65 Binoinano, Abemama, 13/10/2016  
66 Binoinano, Abemama, 13/10/2016
Regardless of where it comes from, virginity is to this day still an important value in Kiribati. Not being a virgin can cancel your wedding and it can bring shame on your family. But this seems to be a value and tradition reserved for women as in theory both men and women should be virgins before marriage, but in practice it is only the woman that is being checked.
6. Present and Future Challenges

Kiribati is faced with a number of challenges both in the present and in the future. The most important ones in the present are water resources, coastal erosion and unemployment. Important future challenges include effects of global climate change and the migration that might follow it. These challenges are all interrelated to each other, for example due to coastal erosion fresh water wells become polluted with seawater and are not usable anymore. In this chapter I will discuss these challenges in more detail based on the interviews and conversations I have carried out.

6.1 Present challenges

6.1.1. Coastal erosion and flooding

Both coastal erosion and fresh water scarcity are the focus points of the Kiribati Adaptation Program Phase III (KAP III). When I asked Manikoati why these areas are especially important he gave me the following answer:

“They are important because in terms of coastal protection our country is basically all coastal. And therefore the government thinks that this should be a priority because it affects everyone’s life, no one can escape from problems that are caused by erosion and by flooding. Once the island is flooded that affects everyone. It affects the ground water on which we depend for the drinking and it affects the vegetation where they depend on for food.”

Here he explains why coastal erosion is one of the biggest challenges Kiribati is facing right now. As almost all Kiribati islands are atoll islands, they are very thin and low and surrounded by the ocean on every side. The highest point on the Kiribati Islands is only 3 meters, thus it is very vulnerable to coastal erosion. Because of this, when coastal erosion occurs it will affect everyone on Kiribati, not only in terms of people losing their land but flooding can also cause the fresh water wells to become polluted (see 6.1.2).

Because of flooding, as Ieru stated in chapter 4, and from the perspective of many Kiribati islanders there “is nowhere to go for us, we are trapped.” Therefore coastal erosion and flooding affects everyone on the islands. The problem has already been discussed thoroughly in Chapter 4 but I will repeat it here quickly and I will also discuss some possible solutions for the problem. Coastal erosion poses several problems for Kiribati; the first one is the erosion of land on which houses are built. A difference can be made between coastal erosion on Tarawa and coastal erosion on the

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67 Bairiki, South Tarawa, 18/10/2016
68 Betio, South Tarawa, 08/09/2016
outer islands. As Tarawa is the most populated island, there is no space for people to move more inland. On the outer islands however, people still have the possibility to move to a different place once their land has been flooded. An example of this that has been discussed before (Chapter 4) is the village of Tebunginako on Abaiang that had to move after a sea inundation. However even after the resettlement parts of the new village still get flooded during a king tide. The islanders have no other possibility than to move again “and once it’s going out we move back.”\textsuperscript{69} After the last king tide, Tebunginako villagers had to rebuild everything they once had. This example shows us that even if people have the possibility to move more inland after coastal erosion has taken place, their land can still get flooded and their problems are not solved over long term.

A second problem that coastal erosion poses is the effect it has on the vegetation in Kiribati. Coastal erosion impacts vegetation in two ways, the first one is that it erodes land that once provided food. An example of this was brought up by Teraoi and is mentioned already in Chapter 4:

“[...] especially around the coast and when you see at the east, some trees are falling down cause the waves eroding the coast.”\textsuperscript{70}

Here coastal erosion affects the vegetation simply because the land were the trees were growing on, has been eroded away. Another way coastal erosion can impact the vegetation is because of flooding. When plantation areas get flooded the plants usually die because of the salt water. To some extent this is what happened in Tebunginako. Before Tebunginako used to have a big plantation but it got flooded. Aata mentioned this during our conversation:

“And when the waves, the sea inundation occurs, it kills all the papaya, the bananas and people move to the inland because you know sea erosion.”\textsuperscript{71}

The difference here is that the land did not erode into the sea but it got flooded. When the ground water becomes salinated, the plants cannot survive.

The most popular solution against coastal erosion is the building of sea walls. Sea walls can either be made of rocks and concrete or of organic materials such as wood. The type of sea wall you can build depends on the place you live.

\textsuperscript{69} Tebunginako, Abaiang, 02/10/2016
\textsuperscript{70} Rawannawi, Marakei, 16/09/2016
\textsuperscript{71} Tebunginako, Abaiang, 02/10/2016
KAP II has facilitated the building of sea wall on the islands but Manikoati, the manager, told me that they “do not allow the people on the outer islands to construct hard structures like sea walls.” KAP II does no facilitate sea walls in outer islands because people on the outer islands still have space to move inland. To stop the coastal erosion people can use things like timber constructions and mangrove planting. On Tarawa most of the sea walls are built under KAP II, these sea walls are concrete structures. However these sea walls are not effective in stopping coastal erosion wholesale. For example, they easily break when the tide gets really strong as Pelenise mentions here:

“People living there their home has just washed away. Even though they keep on trying to build sea walls. It just got washed.”

This shows us that the location of your house and proximity to and quality of a sea wall will determine more if you are vulnerable to coastal erosion or if you are not. Manikoati mentioned a KAP II project in which they used larger rocks to make more durable sea walls:

“The normal coral stone is quite light and during big storms they get washed away. These stones are designed to withstand the strength of the wave they are quite big and very heavy to lift. So maybe unless a tsunami comes and washes the sea wall, I don’t think they will go during a normal storm.”

Using larger stones could help fortify sea walls, however the risk exists that when they do get washed away, they can be dangerous for the people living behind the sea walls. Manikoati, however, thinks that this will not happen unless a really extreme weather event takes place. A second problem with sea walls is that they are often not

72 Bairiki, South Tarawa, 18/10/2016
73 Bairiki, South Tarawa, 18/10/2016
well designed. This is something Manikoati discussed when we talked about the efficiency of the sea walls:

“Because they are designed by our people and our engineers are not that experienced and qualified. And we found that there are a lot of defects on the sea walls. These are the task of the ministries on hand to provide money and to provide the repair for the sea walls. So there should be a monitoring program, a repair program ongoing by the ministry concerned.”

Here Manikoati mentioned that the people designing the sea walls are not trained for it. Because of this, a lot of sea walls break down easily and they need to be repaired on a regular basis. However, maintenance is not the responsibility of KAP III, once the sea walls are built one of the ministries has to take care of them.

The current government is also looking at a second solution to stop coastal erosion. Instead of building sea walls they want to raise the islands to a higher level. Manikoati explained this solution a bit more:

“We will be looking at that possibility of undertaking projects that will see some of the islands of Kiribati being raised to a level quite high that will not be affected by the sea level rise. And we will see that in Temwaiku, that is the first village. If you heard New Zealand is interested to do that in Temwaiku and the government is very supportive of that. Because they want to stay, to remain here.”

Raising the islands will be an expensive undertaking and as Kiribati is one the poorest countries in the world, they will not be able to do it by themselves. Manikoati mentions here that New Zealand might be interested in helping Kiribati with this. Already New Zealand has a lot of construction projects going on in Kiribati as for example building a road on Tarawa. This is a project that has not been undertaken yet, so it is hard to say if it is actually doable and if it is doable if it will be a long-term solution.

6.1.1 Water resources

A second and related future challenge is fresh water resources on Kiribati. Again, when talking to Manikoati, manager of the Kiribati Adaptation Program Phase III (KAP III), he said:

“And water of course because it is our basic need, it’s a very very precious resource for us. When we don’t have enough water like now people are now becoming frightened and very worried about the long drought that we are facing now. And there is not enough water for them to live.”

Because of some of the characteristics of atoll islands, fresh water is scarce. One of these characteristics is that the year is usually split in wet and dry seasons. When I was talking with Pelenise she mentioned why this might be a problem:

“Well, Kiribati is an atoll island and we have the dry seasons and we have the wet seasons but right now I think in the problem is we do not have enough

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74 Bairiki, South Tarawa, 18/10/2016
75 Bairiki, South Tarawa, 18/10/2016
catchment to catch the water during the rainy days to last during the dry seasons.” 76

Manikoati states here that water is a basic need, people need it to survive. With inundation of land ground water is becoming salinated. Changing weather patterns can also have an effect on the availability of water. Thus, mitigation for coming water scarcity is a must in Kiribati.

During the dry seasons there is almost no rain. Because of this proper rain tanks are needed so that the rain from the wet seasons can be used in the dry seasons as well. This can help people if the dry season lasts a bit longer than expected, or if the well they depend on, becomes polluted with seawater or with something else. However when there is a long period of drought, even the rainwater tanks might not be enough. This is something Aata brought up, he mentioned that the rainwater tank in the village “is now finished because no rain this month.” 77 This brings us to a second characteristic of atoll islands. As mentioned just before, atoll islands are very thin, low and their soil consists mostly of coral and sand. This makes is very easy for seawater to pollute the ground water. Ieru explained this problem to me:

“The ocean and the water are polluted. On Kiribati we have a limestone soil so there is not a lot of water and the seawater pollutes it.” 78

Here Ieru mentions that because of the characteristics of the soil, fresh water is not retained in the soil, there is little recharge of ground water and seawater can easily pollute the ground water. Once a well becomes salinated, it is impossible to use it for water or cooking, and people have to find other places to get their water from. Often this means they have to go more inland and they have to carry heavy buckets back to their home. Manikoati mentioned why this is a problem:

“That can be a long way away and the problem is that the task of getting water is put on the shoulders of women and children and it’s not good for them to carry water maybe a kilometre or two from the bush.” 79

As Manikoati mentioned mostly women and children are responsible for the task of getting water. The time that this takes up could have been used for other things such collecting food, paid labour, or education. In this way, the task of having to carry water can force individuals in the household or village that are already vulnerable positions to become even more disadvantaged.

76 Temwaiku, South Tarawa, 23/10/2016
77 Tebuninako, Abaiang, 02/10/2016
78 Betio, South Tarawa, 08/09/2016
79 Bairiki, South Tarawa, 18/10/2016
Another issue is that even when well water is available, there is a high chance that it is polluted with for example bacteria and parasites as water sources are fewer. The well needs to be properly covered so that it is not exposed to too much sunlight and so that no organic material can fall in the well. When I was talking to Iacinta, she told me that most people on the outer islands do not know how to properly use the water. She mentioned that:

“Here if the well is not good, sometimes the well water gets green things. There are green things inside because of the sun. They still use it to bathe with it.”

This quote shows us that people might not be aware of the potential dangers that polluted water poses. This is a problem easily solved by creating better awareness on water usage and the importance of clean water. On Abemama, Tokanikai told me that doctors had come to tell them how to properly use the well water. Before the doctors came children would drink the water straight from the well causing “the kids to get sick, to get diarrhea”. He also mentions “you can see the difference between well water and the boiled water”. This shows us that good education can already solve some of the problems.

When it comes to the water resource challenge, three solutions have been presented to tackle this problem. The first one I have mentioned before, the installation of rainwater tanks. Rainwater tanks make people less dependent on the groundwater and it can help with health problems as well as it is usually cleaner than the groundwater. Manikoati has observed this positive health effect after the instalment of a rainwater system in North Tarawa:

80 Binoinano, Abemama, 13/10/2016
81 Binoinano, Abemama, 13/10/2016
82 Binoinano, Abemama, 13/10/2016
“After building the water systems in North Tarawa, things like diarrhea and baby illness has dropped very significantly.”

This example shows us the positive effect rainwater tanks have on health, especially for young children. So rainwater tanks have a lot of benefits when they are installed properly and taken well care off. However, as mentioned before, when the dry season last especially long, the rainwater tanks might get empty. It is not an unlimited supply of water and much of its benefits depend on how much rain has been caught in the wet season.

Illustration 11: Rainwater tanks in Tehunginako, Abaiang.

A second solution is the instalment of pipes and pumps that transport water from one place to the other. Once these pipes are installed, people do not have to walk to a well to get their water anymore. Everyone would be supplied with water this way. Pipes can solve problems associated with the salinization of groundwater, however they do not stop the salinization process.

The third solution is already discussed before as well, the need for proper education on how to use water. As the example of Abemama shows us, teaching people how to use well water can have significant health effects. Just by boiling the water in the households, fewer children will get sick. KAP III has a program for this as Manikoati explained to me:

“People also need to be educated on how to use water properly. It’s no use providing this when they don’t know how to use this in a hygienic manner, so part of the program is also teaching people the importance of cleaning your hands and keeping the water covered, the well and the rain water clean so they don’t become a source of illness for the people.”

83 Bairiki, South Tarawa, 18/10/2016
84 Bairiki, South Tarawa, 18/10/2016
Manikoati mentions here that just the instalment of rainwater tanks or pipes is not enough to tackle the health problem. People need to be educated on how to use the water in a hygienic way. If the tank or the well is not properly taken care of they might have adverse effects on people’s health.

6.1.3 Unemployment

A third challenge for Kiribati is unemployment of the people. I have discussed this problem already in Chapter 4, from the perspective of some voices from islanders, but I will discuss it here in more detail. A lot of people in Kiribati are unemployed and for most of them this is not a problem; they live on the outer islands and they manage to sustain themselves, and even earn some money by collecting things from their surroundings. On Tarawa, and especially on South Tarawa, life is different. Because Tarawa is so densely populated, collecting food and growing it is not an option anymore. There is simply not enough space for it. Therefore people on Tarawa often need jobs to be able to buy food. Pelenise made this difference between unemployment on Tarawa and unemployment on the outer islands during our conversation:

“We have unemployed people on the outer islands but because they are on their own land in their own homes. Tarawa is like a town, it is an urban area. And when you come and stay here, the youth on Tarawa they don’t really occupy their time with work but in the outer islands unemployed people they work and when they work, they go fishing, they cut their toddy, they plant, they go to their plantation. That’s employment, they provide food for themselves and the children are staying with their parents in the outer islands would be expected to do so. They cut copra to earn money, they do all that. But when you are on Tarawa you have no copra to cut, you should go fishing but maybe the family you are staying with do not have fishing gears so they do not go fishing.”

Pelenise summarises several important factors that have an effect on type of unemployment. The first one is the difference in landscape between Tarawa and the outer islands. On the outer islands people possess lands and can therefore plant trees and collect vegetation. Tarawa however is defined as an urban area where this is not possible. Pelenise also mentions that even though people on the outer islands are not formally employed, they are still employed in the sense that they can provide for themselves and for their families. During the day, they are busy with trying to get food on the table for that day. On Tarawa however, unemployed people do not have these things to occupy their days with. They cannot go fishing, cannot cut toddy, or cannot plant some trees. They have nothing to do all day. Because they cannot do anything, they are also not able to provide for themselves so they often depend on family members that do have jobs. So unemployment is mostly a problem for people living in Tarawa, on the outer islands they have different ways of taking care of themselves.

Because people do not have anything to do, they often cause problems or get married young. When I was talking to Pelenise, she mentioned why people marrying young is a big problem for Kiribati:

85 Temwaiku, South Tarawa, 23/10/2016
“Many of them get married because they have nothing else to do. And so when they get married they quickly have children and the population gets high and these children are brought up by very young children who are not even ready to get married.”

Getting married young is problematic for several reasons, which Pelenise mentioned here. The first problems arises when young couples gets children. They are often not ready to take care of children yet; as they are both still young themselves and they do not have jobs. Often the relatives that are supporting the unemployed youth are put under more stress, as now they have to take care of even more people. A second problem is that unemployment causes emotional and social stress. Ieru connects people getting bored and frustrated with people that start drinking, which then often leads to abuse and violence. Ieru put these two in relation to each other:

“Unemployment as well is a big issue. And that drives especially the youth to do mischievous things and it’s sad that here in Tarawa there have been a lot of people who have been doing things like abusing people. Maybe they are stressed because they don’t have jobs so it leads to a lot of things, problems, especially in Betio.”

Here Ieru mentions that people who do not have jobs feel stressed. Because of this stress they often act out by for example abusing people. Both Pelenise and Ieru have mentioned that unemployment is especially problematic for the youth. It is unclear to me if the mean this in terms of that young people act out more, or simply because there are more young people unemployed.

A third problem related to unemployment is that people become dependent on their relatives who do have jobs and salaries. This is something I have already discussed in Chapter 4.2.2. People migrate to Tarawa to get better education or to find a job. On Tarawa there are, however, a limited number of jobs and not everyone is able to get one. Despite education, once students have graduated, it is still difficult to find job opportunities. Unemployed people become dependent on their relatives, a problem that Pelenise has discussed:

“The parents [of the unemployed youth] are on the outer islands but they are staying here with their uncles and their aunties who are working on Tarawa who are maybe providing all the needs. All the things that they need but with the understanding that these kids will try and look for a job or go back to study. And the unemployment also causes a lot of stress on those who are working on Tarawa because all their family members.”

Here Pelenise relates how the family members will give some household members everything they need with the understanding that they will be able to look after themselves after a while. When they stay unemployed, however, their relatives need to look after them for a longer time than anticipated which puts them under a lot of stress. The individuals that do work are forced to work more so that they can afford taking care of their family that live in with them. As mentioned before, this problem increases if young people get married young. In addition, young people from the outer islands that went to school in Tarawa might not even be able to move to the outer

86 Temwaiku, South Tarawa, 23/10/2016  
87 Betio, South Tarawa, 08/09/2016  
88 Temwaiku, South Tarawa, 23/10/2016
islands again because they do not possess the skills to take care of themselves there. Pelenise mentioned this problem when talking about the education system. According to her the education system today is very much focused on “Western science” and not on Kiribati science.

“We educate our children without skills. We take them all the way to form 7 without having one skill. And a skill can be cooking like to become a chef or a pastrymaker or a tailor who can sow or a fisherman. When I say a skill a real good skill apart from the from learning whatever subjects they are learning in high school the students must have a skill because if they couldn’t make it in high school form 7 and they drop out, they couldn’t make it in university they already have a skill with them and that skill they can use for their own self employment.”

For Pelenise, if the students were taught a skill, they would have a back up in case they cannot get into university or in case they cannot get a job with the things they learned in high school. If they know a skill they can move back to the outer islands to provide for themselves or they can start their own business as for example becoming a tailor, to name just one. A more diverse education could be one of the solutions for the unemployment issue.

As mentioned in Chapter 4.2.2 the government also tries to get people to move back to the outer islands by doubling the price of copra. If you as an individual do not know how to climb a coconut tree and how to make copra, copra production is not a viable work. Often people are also reluctant want to move back to the outer islands, as they have got accustomed to life on Tarawa Island. Especially if people have been raised on Tarawa since they were children, it might be difficult for them to move back again.

On a side note, some people on the outer island find the lack of jobs on the outer islands a problem as well. They do not have real options to earn money; they have to rely on collecting food from their surroundings and hope that they will be able to sell some of it. Tiriia talked about how she experiences the lack of jobs to be a problem:

“Because we don’t have jobs so we have to work hard to get food like we have to go to the sea during the low tide and get shellfish and fishing. That’s the main challenges, everyday life we have to go looking for the food and we try to find a place to get money.”

This quote shows us that having no well-paid job can create insecurity. You have to go look for food everyday because otherwise you will simply have no food to eat. Living day by day on natural resources also makes it hard to save money of any kind. The small amount of money you get from for example selling fish or copra, will often not be enough to make a big investment. An example that was raised by one informant was, as most people have some relatives living overseas in Fiji or Australia, it is very hard for a person in the outer island to go see relatives abroad if you do not earn money. This also related to the next part, future challenges, in which I will discuss migration.

89 Temwaiku, South Tarawa, 23/10/2016
90 Temwaiku, South Tarawa, 23/10/2016
91 Tebero, Abaiang, 26/09/2016
6.2 Future challenges

Kiribati faces two important challenges in the future that are related to each other, global climate change and migration being the foremost. Climate change is already a present challenge as I have discussed above but here I will focus on the future effects of it.

6.2.1 Climate Change

As discussed in Chapter 4.2.1 people in Kiribati have an ambiguous relationship with climate change. They do not always believe in it and even if they do it is seen as something that can or they hope to be able to overcome. Uera has expressed this feeling during our interview:

“Because we know that there is climate change but we feel not fear now we just go and live as normal.”

The quotes I have presented elsewhere suggest that awareness of global climate change exist amongst at least some individuals in Kiribati but that coastal erosion and flooding is not seen as necessarily linked to global climate change. As pointed out by Uera above, for most individuals it is simply not possible to deal with global climate change as a problem. It is easier to just carry on with your daily life than to worry about what will happen in the future. It is difficult to accept that your island, your home might disappear in a not so distant future. As Manikoati mentioned it is a political problem as well. The previous government under Anote Tong was very vocal about the negative impacts on Kiribati of global climate change and was very active in global forums. The current government was then in the opposition and was claiming that climate change was not a big problem. In this chapter I will discuss some of the problems that climate change might cause in the future. The main problem that respondents have brought up is the fear that global climate change will cause their islands to disappear.

The danger of flooding is also linked to the fear that they will be forced to move to another country. Ieru talked about the difficult situation for Kiribati by saying that “there is nowhere to go for us, we are trapped.” I have used this quote several times in this thesis as I think this very personal statement summarise shows the predicament Kiribati islanders find themselves in. If the sea levels rise to a level where they are high enough to flood all the islands, Kiribati islanders have nowhere to move to. Often in other countries when a natural disaster happens like for example a forest fire, there are evacuation places people can go to. Because the whole of Kiribati is low with the highest point being 3 meter, no islander will have a safe place to go to once their island is flooded: they are trapped. When I was talking to Atanimoa she expressed her personal fear that Kiribati might get flooded one day:

“It is very dangerous because I think if the climate change continues and you know that our island in Kiribati is very small and if the sea rises up we can’t survive because it is very small and the water will come to our land and we can’t live.”

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92 Rawannawi, Marakei, 16/09/2016
93 Betio, South Tarawa, 08/09/2016
94 Rawannawi, Marakei, 21/09/2016
Here Atanimoa mentions that if climate change continues going the way it is going now, she is afraid that Kiribati will disappear because the islands are so small and low. In the case that happens, she thinks Kiribati islanders will have to move; they cannot survive on Kiribati anymore. Ieru mentioned the same concerns when I talked to him:

“It’s threatened by the climate change. The rising sea levels take away our land and our water and also for health it is threatening.”

Ieru talks about how rising sea levels caused by global climate change will wash away Kiribati. He also thinks that because of more flooding, Kiribati water supplies will become polluted. Water shortage might be a problem caused by climate change that will manifest itself before the islands disappear. As discussed in Chapter 6.1.1 the problem may be worsened by changing weather patterns. Uera expressed the same concern that Kiribati will sink. He already sees this happening around him:

“As you know climate change as our president went to the rest of the world, to talk about the sea rise. [...] Some sea walls are already broken and some new ones are to be made to protect. So we like to migrate to some other countries cause we know Kiribati will how many years later will be sink.”

Here Uera mentions that he heard about climate change from the former president, Anote Tong. He also talks about some of the effects the sea level rise has right now in Kiribati. Sea walls that are supposed to protect Kiribati have already collapsed because of the waves and the tides. He also mentions his belief that Kiribati will sink and that they will have to move to another country. Tebau is pretty certain that Kiribati will disappear but only after 60 years:

“Kiribati will disappear. I agree with what the wise men said that we will be in the water after 60 or 70 years.”

He got this information from wise men or scientists and he believes that Kiribati will disappear. However, only after 60 years which Kiribati still some time to prepare for it. These quotes show us that people are mostly afraid that Kiribati will disappear in a couple of years because of climate change. When this will happen, they can only guess but it is something that is present in their thinking about the future.

6.2.2 Migration

As mentioned in the previous part, people are afraid they will be forced to migrate to another country in time. In this part I will discuss how people think this will affect them and how they think about and discuss migration as a future possibility.

Many respondents I talked to expressed fears of moving to a different country because they have never been overseas. They worry that they will not know how to do things because life is so different. As mentioned before in several chapters, the idea exists that life in Kiribati is simple. Most people collect their own food and they hardly have to go to the store to buy anything. In another country however they might not be able to get their own food and they have to find a way to make money to buy it. This is concern Atanimoa expressed during our conversation:

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95 Betio, South Tarawa, 08/09/2016
96 Rawannawi, Marakei, 16/09/2016
“We think about moving but how to survive there if we don’t know how to find our food or our job in another country.”

This quote is representative of several other individual’s statements about the risk that they might have to move. Migrating is scary for Kiribati islanders in the same way that moving to Kiribati may be scary for a European. For example, if I had to move to Kiribati outer islands I would not know how to climb a tree and get the coconut or even how to manage the fishing necessary to sustain myself. I would need someone to explain or to show me how things are done. I would need to know people to introduce me to the new landscape and people. The example relates to a second worry about moving abroad. People are afraid they will lose their community and nobody will help them out. As discussed in Chapter 5.1 community is very important for Kiribati islanders and often when they explain what their community is they compare it to the Western world where nobody smiles or says hello on the street and where you do not even know your neighbours. Atanea expressed this well in our conversation:

“Because if you live overseas, there is only you. Maybe your wife or husband or children but very close house. So you know the love that you share here, you know it will disappear.”

This quote (and others presented in previous chapters) shows that many Kiribati individuals share the idea that in other countries there are not the same kind of connections and cohesiveness in communities as in Kiribati. Your family is only your core family; you do not have anyone else besides them.

A third and related reason why people are hesitant to move is because they are afraid they will lose their culture and their identity. When I was talking to Ieru he mentioned that he thinks they will have to move but that when they move they will lose everything:

“I love my island but in this kind of situation I don’t have any other kind of choice, I am forced to move and migrate. And for the sake of my children and for myself as well, if we have no other option here we’ll move. But everything will be affected, our traditional skills, our culture, everything.”

Ieru feels that he has no other option but to move to keep his family safe. However if they do move, they will lose much of what defines them as individuals. This exemplifies how landscape and identity are closely connected to each other. If you move to a different place, you will have to adapt to a different culture and in that process you might lose some of your own culture. Pelenise talked about how she thinks Kiribati identity and culture will change if people are forced to move to a different island:

“Because it is not easy to move a total population and a culture to just out and move them to another country, no. It will be extinct or if they are not extinct they lose and change. They’ll change and I know the culture will continue to grow and change but it will change quickly and we will mainly lose as I-Kiribati people and soon we won’t have the time for our elders, we won’t have the time for our children, all we do is learning how to survive by working.”

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97 Rawannawi, Marakei, 21/09/2016
98 Tebero, Abaiang, 26/09/2016
99 Betio, South Tarawa, 08/09/2016
100 Temwaiku, South Tarawa, 23/10/2016
First of all, Pelenise mentions that it will be impossible to move the whole population to the same place. That will already have an effect on Kiribati identity, as communities will be forced to split up. A second reason why migrating would be bad for Kiribati identity, is that living in a different country will change it rapidly. Pelenise states one of the reasons for this; because people will have to get jobs they will not have as much time as they have now for their children and their elders.

Another concept is related to this is the concept of ancestral land. Ancestral land means that I-Kiribati own the land their houses were built on because they inherited it from their ancestors. Formally the government of Kiribati does not own any land, but the people of Kiribati do own land through customary use and customary property laws. Because the land has passed on through generations, people are very attached to it, as people have explained. It has a meaning to the owners that succeeds ownership of land, as for example your whole family may be buried in the same place. It is not easy to just leave this legacy and inheritance behind.

However not everyone is averse to moving to a different country. Some people I talked to said that they personally would like to migrate to someplace else. Tebuntintaake is one of them:

“Yes, I’d like to move because here the jobs are limited so maybe overseas or any other place in the world, if we move there we it’s easy to find jobs, get money. Here it’s the daily life you know. In the morning get coconut, shells, rice.”

Tebuntintaake does not like the “simple way of life” in Kiribati. She would prefer to get a job and earn some money so that she does not have to collect food everyday. This quote from Tebuntintaake shows us that what might be a reason for one person to want to stay on Kiribati might be a reason for someone else to want to leave. The issue of migration is very complex one, and I did not have the time to fully explore this issue with the respondents. The previous government was very focused on ‘migration with dignity’ (see Chapter 1) and trying to make agreements with other countries about it. The current government is looking more into staying and raising the level of the islands. What I have been able to capture here is the sentiments of a few individuals. I believe that exploring the sentiments around migration more fully would in fact be a topic deserving a few theses on its own.

101 Tebunginako, Abaiang, 04/10/2016
7. Conclusion

This thesis was aimed at trying to answer the following research questions:

1. Do Kiribati residents see a change in the landscape?
   - If so how do they define it and what do they see as causes of it?

2. How do Kiribati residents define and construct I-Kiribati-identities?

3. What do Kiribati people define as present and future challenges for their island?

Before summarising changes in the landscape it is important to discuss how I-Kiribati define landscape and what they mean by it. The people I have talked to mainly discussed landscape in terms of physical surroundings (natural landscape) but it is clear that the landscape is more than that. Cultural practices and traditional skills such as cutting toddy, fishing, and cultivating papaya, are also passed on through it. On page 40, Iacinta in Abemama gave one example of how everyday practices are present in the landscape. As Iacinta mentioned in Chapter 4, one of the reasons why there are fewer trees now than before on Abemama is the fact that people prefer imported food such as rice. Mainly because it usually takes less time to prepare. The landscape on Kiribati also contains memories and heritage. For example, the use of maneabas is a result of the Samoan migration in the 14th century. Maneabas were also used to pass on navigational skills as the balks on the ceiling represent different stars in different times of the year. Another example of how landscape is tied to memory and heritage this is the system of ancestral land that has come up a few times before, in Chapter 6 the most elaborated. The most important changes that the respondents noticed were related to changes in the coastline and temperature, and population changes. These changes are also related to each other. For example when coastal erosion happens on Tarawa, like in Eita, it exacerbates problems of population increase as it forces people to live even more closely together. From the interviews presented here it is clear that there are many explanations of landscape change. When asked what caused coastline and temperature changes, respondents usually stated that they did not know why these physical changes happened (see Chapter 4). Some individuals said that they had been told that it was because of climate change. However some of them remained sceptical of the climate change explanation, as they did not believe it for personal or political reasons. Believing in it often makes it real and the previous opposition party (now in the government) expressed disbelief in climate change as a way to oppose the party in the previous government (under Anote Tong). Now that they are the leading party, they have changed their stance on climate change. Other individuals knew about climate change and identified it as the cause for these changes. There was a stronger consensus around the cause for population changes as most people pointed to migration from the outer islands to Tarawa as the main reason for the population increase on the main island. However, as pointed out above, the effects of these population increases have been aggravated by the loss of land due to floods from the sea.

As landscape is more than just a natural landscape as I have exemplified above and several times in this thesis, it is an important part of the I-Kiribati identity. Apart from being linked with memory and heritage, people also depend on the landscape for their
livelihood. As already discussed above, traditional skills, knowledge and practices are passed on through landscape practices. Importantly the landscape enables the ‘simple life’. Amongst other things this means self-sufficiency and was brought up by many residents as something positive. Two important qualities that were brought forward in the interviews are also linked to the landscape. Community was continuously brought up as an important quality related to identity. On Kiribati everyone is part of a community that looks out for each other and that is important for your social life. Traditionally, every community is linked to a village, but new communities have also emerged through the church, especially for people that have moved from their native villages. Important parts of the community are the friendship and love that exists between community members and the elders who are usually in charge of the community. People still come together frequently in their community or church maneabas. Another quality interviewed informants raised as important in relation to their I-Kiribati identity are what they defined as I-Kiribati values. The most important value is having respect for your elders. Elders still play an important role in the community, a role similar to the one of elders in the past. The importance of elders for holding the community together was already discussed above. Another value brought up by respondents is the peaceful life they live without any major conflicts or problems encompassed in the expression the ‘simple life’. For a large part respondents and other people I have talked to attributed ‘simple life’ to the friendship and happiness on the islands and to the fact that they not have to worry about money or buying food. Another value that was brought up by respondents and that was somewhat unexpected for me was the importance of being a virgin before marriage. It is unclear to me if this is related to the church or an older tradition. In theory both men and women have to be virgins, but in practice it is mostly enforced on women.

The biggest present and future challenges are related to questions of landscape and identity. People fear that their island and their resources will disappear, as they are already experiencing coastal erosion and problems with their fresh water resources. People are afraid that these environmental problems will force them to migrate in the long term. For I-Kiribati leaving their country behind often means fear of losing their identity and community. To compensate for the absence of their ‘homelandscape’, people might start imagining their home through memories they have of it, to try to re-establish the link between landscape and identity they experienced before (Gupta and Ferguson 1992: 10; Malkki 1992: 24). One way to recuperate parts of your cultural identity might be to look up people from where you are from so you could for example speak your language. This is a coping strategy one of the people I talked to, Francis, mentioned when we were talking about what he would miss about Kiribati:

“Especially if you leave Kiribati and you can’t speak Kiribati. If you see an I-Kiribati that speaks Kiribati you can talk to him, you like him better.”

This example shows us that for Francis moving to another country would have some effects on his identity. To compensate for the fact of not being in Kiribati anymore Francis would look up other I-Kiribati to shape a new community and ‘landscape’ that would make him feel more at home. This to me exemplifies how migrating to another country does not necessarily mean losing one’s identity. As discussed in Chapter 3 identities are not fixed and can change. Another present challenge that has an effect on both the I-Kiribati landscape and individual identity is the rise of unemployment on Tarawa. On the outer islands being unemployed is not a big problem because

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102 Binoinano, Abemama, 12/10/2016
people have learned how to produce their own food and they also have enough land to do so. On Tarawa however, not everyone possesses these skills anymore and even if they do, they might not have the land to produce food. Some of the respondents mentioned that being unemployed has several effects on people. They often get married and have children at a younger age. To pass the time some of them start drinking which often leads to violence and abuse. Unemployment also puts stress on relatives who have to support them, as explained by Pelenise in Chapter 6.

As the research has shown us landscape and identity are related to each other in several ways (see above). The landscape is constantly changing which has an effect on identities and identities are always in process, which has an effect on the landscape. Each of the analytical chapters (Chapter 4, 5, and 6) can be researched more deeply in separate studies. It would also be interesting to visit people who have already migrated to different countries to see how they identify themselves and their relationship to their landscape.

The future of Kiribati is uncertain as scientists predict the country might disappear over the next few decades (Worland, 2015). Much of its fate lies in the hands of climate negotiations where the world’s biggest emitters are slow in taking measures to stop global warming. The previous government of Anote Tong accepted the grim future of Kiribati and purchased land in Fiji to migrate to. He also set up programs for migration with dignity to facilitate the process (see Chapter 1). The current government, however, still has hope for Kiribati and is more focused on finding ways to be able to stay on the islands. One of the measures they are looking at is raising the islands, possibly with the help of New Zealand.

In case of a resettlement, it is important to keep in mind the issues that I have brought up in this thesis. A key part of migration would be to work through the community associations and to not divide them up. This would help people to cope with living in a different country as they still have the support from their community in case they need it. A second important issue is a focus on what Anote Tong called migration with dignity. If Kiribati residents have a skill or knowledge, resettling will be easier as they have a bigger chance on finding a job.

However, despite these bleak predictions the people of Kiribati have not given up hope yet, and many still see a future for Kiribati as Pelenise mentioned:

“I know there is a bright future for Kiribati, we just have to give Kiribati a chance to survive.”\(^\text{103}\)

\(^{103}\) Temwaiku, South Tarawa, 23/10/2016
8. References

8.1 Literature


8.2 Respondents

8.2.1 Tarawa

Ieru – Betio – 08/09/2016

I met Ieru during a community outreach project focused on diabesity by the Kiribati Health Retreat. Ieru was one of the people participating in the program as he wanted to become healthier for his children. Ieru is in his 30’s and a carpenter by profession. During his interview I used a translator. We talked outside the maneaba the outreach program was taken place.
Tebwebwe – Bairiki – 10/09/2016

Tebwebwe currently works at the Ministry of Finance but was running for office at the time I met her. She invited me to a local football tournament where she was present for her campaign. Tebwebwe is 25 and I conducted the interview with her in English.

Manikoati (KAP III) – Bairiki – 18/10/2016

I scheduled an interview with Manikoati to learn more about the Kiribati Adaptation Program Phase III (KAP III) as they work closely together with the government and donors to adapt Kiribati to the changing landscape. We talked in his office mostly from the viewpoint of KAP III but sometimes he would also give me his personal opinion. We talked in English.

Pelenise – Temwaiku – 23/10/2016

Pelenise is the person I contacted before going to Kiribati and she helped me set up my research and find accommodation. She works for the Kiribati Climate Action Network (KiriCAN) and that is how I came into contact with her. Without Pelenise’s help I would never have been able to do all things I did, as she was always ready to help me out and to assist me in understanding the Kiribati way of doing things. We had numerous interesting conversations during breakfast and dinner and a more formal interview on the 23rd of October.

8.2.2 Marakei


Uera owns a small business where I met him and he is also a police constable on Marakei. He always made sure that he some big water bottles in store for us and he gave us tips on what to do on the island. For the interview we went to the police office, which is a small colonial building with two holding cells. This interview was in English.


Teraoi is also a police constable on Marakei. I met him when Uera invited me to the police office. He also works on the land his family owns to help them provide their food. This interview was in English as well.


I first met Tebau when I rented a bike from him; afterwards I met with him on several occasions as he was the grandfather of one of the people managing the guesthouse I was staying in. Tebau is an elder, a former mayor of Marakei, and a retired teacher currently teaching again. He also guides people on tours on Marakei. As he has lived his whole life on Marakei and possesses a lot of knowledge about it, he was a very interesting person to talk to. I talked with him in English.

Tanua – Rawannawi – 21/09/2016

Tanua is a teacher at the local elementary school. I talked to him during the break under the watchful eyes of a lot of school children. He has lived his entire life on Marakei as well and the interview was conducted in English.
Atanimoa – Rawannawi – 21/09/2016

Atanimoa is a teacher at the same school as Tanua. I stayed during her class for a little while as she was teaching the children an English song about the sounds the animals make. I remembered a song from when I was learning English and taught that to the children too. We talked in English.

8.2.3 Abaiang

I met Tiria at the community house of her local church. She is an elder and during the interview she was making a school bag out of an empty rice bag for one of her children. Towards the end of the interview Atanea joined in as well. He is also an elder and is still active as a carpenter sometimes. For this interview I used a translator.

Aata – Tebunginako – 02/10/2016

Aata is a village elder of Tebunginako and my translator introduced me to him. We talked in his kiakia while drinking some coconut. He lives on subsistence and for this interview I used a translator.

Tebuntintaake – Tebunginako – 04/10/2016

I met Tebuntintaake during a game of bingo in the village maneaba of Tebunginako. My translator took me there to find some people to talk to you. They were also preparing some bread wrapped in pandanus leaves.

Kaaibo – Tebunginako – 04/10/2016

Kaaibo was present in the same maneaba as the one I met Tebuntintaake and Iutita in. During the interview she was also taking care of her son. I used a translator for this interview.

Iutita – Tebunginako – 04/10/2016

Iutita is the last person I spoke to in the maneabe. She did not participate in the bingo but was preparing food for her family. I also used a translator to talk to her.

8.2.4 Abemama
Francis – Binoinano – 12/10/2016

Francis is the religion and music teacher of the high school our guesthouse was located next to. We met before lunch between his classes in his kiakia. Francis has lived his entire life in Abemama. This interview was in English.

Keanteang – Binoinano – 13/10/2016

Keanteang owns a small business in Binoinano but lives in the village next to it. We met when I was looking for water as the rain water tank we were previously using became polluted. He also sold some traditional lava lava’s that are worn when you want to enter a maneaba. We talked in English.

Tokanikai – Binoinano – 13/10/2016

I met Tokanikai in the school maneaba after classes. He was marking some tests but did not mind having a conversation with me. Tokanikai is an elder.
and he had a lot of stories to tell about Abemama’s history and customs. This interview was in English.

Iacinta – Binoinano – 13/10/2016

Iacinta owns the guesthouse we were staying at in Abemama. She was always happy to talk to us during breakfast or dinner. Right before we arrived she had rescued three small pigs as their mother was sold or stolen and they were left behind. She also had two small kittens that played with the pigs. This interview was in English.
Appendix 1: Interview Questions

These are some examples of questions I used during my interviews. As discussed in Chapter 3 I used a semi-structured format in which I had some guiding questions but there was also room for new ones.

- How would you describe your normal day?
- What is the greatest challenge/problem for Kiribati?
- Do you see any changes in the landscape?
  - Why do you think these changes happen?
- How would you define being I-Kiribati?
  - Is this changing?
- Where do you get your food/water from?
  - Is there any change in the food production/ water resources?
- What does your community mean to you?
  - Is this changing?
- Would you ever consider migrating to a different country?
- What would you miss if you lived in a different country?